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MARGARET

AND

HER BRIDESMAIDS.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "WOMAN'S DEVOTION."

"Queen Rose of the Rosebud garden of girls."—TENNYSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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I DEDICATE THIS TALE TO

MARGARET, MY SISTER,

FEELING SURE,

THAT THE SEVEN OTHER SISTERS WHO EQUALLY

BELONG TO US BOTH,

WILL APPLAUD MY SELECTION, AND APPROVE OF

MY BOOK, IF ONLY FOR

HER SWEET SAKE.

MARGARET

AND HER BRIDESMAIDS.

CHAPTER I.

In a small room, furnished so as to indicate its purport—a study—sat four girls. One placed rather apart from the others, occupied herself in some fancy-work, denoting by this, as well as by her age and appearance, that she was no longer a school-girl; neither could she be mistaken for a governess. Her rich dress and patrician air, rather pointed her out as a parlour-boarder among those who were diligently occupied in painting and drawing.

A large, fair, indolent-looking girl was employed in copying the picture of a chubby, smiling baby, while her neighbour, a dark-haired, bright-looking picture of a regular school-girl, strove in vain to impart a beautiful curl to the moustache of a knight. Her pencil was obstinate, and evidently possessed of a common-place mind, for nothing could induce it, guided by fingers ever so willing, to perform such "a love of a moustache," as the original from which it was copying.

In somewhat scornful distance from these two, sat a girl of eighteen, painting flowers. Now and then they tittered and laughed together in a subdued tone, as if indulging in some jest at the expense of the flower-painter, who, erect and disdainful, showed no other symptom of annoyance, than a slight dilating of her nostril, and a curl of the lip, that approached a sneer too nearly not to mar her Saxon beauty.

The graceful worker by the fire would raise

her serene pure eyes to the school-girl scoffers, now and then when they ventured a thought too far for politeness, and they would subdue their voices, as if in answer to the appeal. Through the crevices of large folding doors, came the hum and murmur of a busy school, which opening now, filled the smaller room with sound, until the new comer shut the door.

A little, slight, childish thing, with thick rich curls in high confusion all over her head; she proceeded to pour a quantity of counters, or good marks, into a little drawer in a bureau.

"Ah! Lotty," said the worker, "have you really gained all those?"

"Where is Margaret?" answered Lotty, quickly, and looking from one to the other, with large dark eyes of extraordinary intelligence and beauty.

"She is here," said a soft voice, at the small door of the apartment.

They all exclaimed in various keys and

phrases; but Margaret's face told a tale that hushed them.

They had parted from her the evening before, a gay school-girl, as thoughtless and merry as themselves.

But some extraordinary change had taken place. Margaret was blushing, confused, her eyes veiled, her voice tremulous as she said, in answer to their queries as to what had delayed her so long—

"I have been engaged, I mean I am engaged; I have only come for a few moments, I am going—that is, I wished to tell you myself, I am going to be married!"

"Law! my dear!" exclaimed Florence, the moustache attempter.

"How nice!" drawled Caroline, the baby delineator.

"God bless my Margaret!" said Millicent, the worker.

"How very strange!" murmured the scornful Augusta.

"*No!*" came from the little compressed angry lips of Lotty.

"And mamma," continued the blushing bride elect, "permits me to come and ask you, I mean she would be glad—and you know that I shall be so also; oh! so happy, so pleased, if you will all be my bridesmaids."

"I shall be delighted, my love," cried Florence.

"How very nice!" exclaimed Caroline with alacrity.

"With heartfelt pleasure, sweet Meg," whispered Millicent.

"If it is soon," said Augusta sententiously, "I shall be happy to oblige you."

A most strenuous and indignant "Never!" burst from the lips of the little Lotty, as she fled from the room.

Then they all left their several occupations, and in utter defiance of school hours, and manners, they crowded round the blushing Margaret.

She had taken shelter at this important era of her life in the loving arms of Milly, her eyes glancing up but once, as the little, impetuous Lotty left the room; then, the irrepressible smile of a new gladness born in a fine and sensitive heart, broke in dimples round her mouth, telling that tale the eyes hoped to conceal.

"What shall you be married in, dear?" said Caroline.

"And how will the bridesmaids be dressed?" asked Florence, anxiously.

"Shall you be married in church, or by special licence in the drawing room? the latter is so nice, and no trouble," said Caroline.

"Don't have a bonnet, if you love me, but be covered with a veil from head to foot," cried Florence. "And also other flowers are worn in the bridal wreath now, besides orange blossom, which, I think a blessing."

"A blessing on my Margaret," whispered Milly's gentle voice.

"But, my dear, who is the happy man?" said Augusta. "And may I beg you to be early in naming the day, otherwise I know not if I can officiate as bridesmaid."

"Pray, why not?" asked Florence, mockingly.

"I may be a bride myself," answered Augusta, haughtily. "My marriage is likely to take place within a few months."

"To whom, I wonder!" exclaimed the two girls sarcastically. "Is it the old postman, or the policeman round the corner?"

"For shame!" retorted Augusta; "you judge of me by yourselves; a pair of hoyden school-girls, who cannot see when a gentleman shows his preference by the delicate attentions of a gentleman. I allude to Sir Harold Leigh."

"Who?" said Margaret, raising herself from Millicent's arms; "ah no, Augusta!"

"Wherefore not, my dear, do you think no one has a lover but yourself?"

Margaret placed her hand on Augusta's mouth.

"Hush!" she said, "he is here, he is with mamma, he is my Harold, I am his Margaret."

And at this avowal the fair face grew crimson with blushes, and was fain to hide itself in Milly's redundant curls. Augusta tried to laugh off her mistake with ill-concealed dismay, but the other girls were too happy in the prospects of a wedding and all its fun, to laugh at her as unmercifully as she deserved, so that she soon recovered her usual composure and assurance.

Besides, they all loved Margaret so well, her happiness absorbed all other feelings.

Caroline loved her, because she was so unselfish and generous, virtues in which she did not shine herself.

Florence because Margaret was so simple and ingenuous, not able to say what she did not think (a quality quite out of Miss Florence's way, by the by).

Augusta loved her, or rather liked her, because Margaret was rich and well-born, and

freely imparted the advantages of the first quality to those who required them.

Millicent, because she saw in Margaret a pure and loving heart like her own, within the pious depths of which, none knew the strength and power that would come forth.

Lotty loved her—but Lotty is a wilful little thing, and it is hardly possible to say whom she loved, or why she loved. One thing alone was certain; when Lotty loved, it was no half measures—her heart and soul were alike involved. But the unusual commotion in the inner school-room had made itself known through the folding doors, and Miss Elton, the head governess, appeared.

Millicent divulged the happy tidings, Margaret was kissed and congratulated, a holiday given on the spot to the whole school, upon her whispered request, and, after asking for Millicent and Lotty to remain the day and evening with her, Margaret departed.

A strange, fluttering sensation filled her

heart, as she passed through the garden, and heard the merry laughter and joyous glee of her schoolmates.

She felt happy, but it was an awe-struck happiness, that made her think the world too small to contain such feelings, and only in the pure and lofty firmament of Heaven could she find space sufficient for the love and gratitude welling from her heart. It seemed to her as if a new sun, a fairer sky, a more brilliant world was placed before her; and yet she had done nothing, had no claim to make for such gifts. Therefore they might fade; to-morrow they might be gone—leaving behind that grey cloud of blight and disappointment, consequent upon such a flood of light and happiness. As she placed her hand upon her heart, to still its tumultuous beating, and that one dread feeling, "could all this be real?" she heard a faint sob, which came from behind a tree.

"My little Lotty," exclaimed Margaret, springing to her schoolfellow's side.

"Why do you wish to marry?" murmured Lotty, turning her wet face from Margaret's kisses.

"Because, because—" began Margaret.

"Was not I your husband?" interrupted Lotty, impetuously; "and have not I always been your little fond, foolish husband ever since I came to school?"

"Yes, my Lotty, and so you shall always be my little school husband."

"Then why do you want another? I have always been a very kind, good husband; mended all your pens, done all your sums, run all your messages, and would have told fibs for you."

"That last was quite unnecessary, you know, little Lotty—"

"Don't joke with me. I cannot bear it, but who is he? I don't mind your marrying one person that I know of, and if it is him I won't fret any more, for it is very fatiguing."

Margaret could only whisper the name.

Lotty exclaimed loudly.

"Oh, hush, Lotty!" besought Margaret.

"I thought that man was making love to Augusta."

"And so did poor Augusta herself," said Margaret, her eyes drooping.

"However," said Lotty brightening up, "I always told her the truth, that he really did not care for her one straw, but admired you more, and I was right."

"Poor Augusta!" murmured Margaret, her new sun, bright world, and happy feelings beginning to fade.

"Not at all," said Lotty; "she made the most love, and besides he has shewn his good taste, though he is not the right man, mind, Margaret, so I never will give my consent. He is a good judge of a horse though; Lucifer, the steeple-chaser, belongs to him; I should like to ride that horse, Queen Meg."

"Nonsense, Lotty!"

"Why say 'nonsense,' Margaret? I will

try and reconcile myself to the marriage, if you will ask Sir Harold to let me ride Lucifer sometimes."

"He may consent, but I shall not, Lotty."

"Supposing he were to throw me, which no horse ever did yet, Margaret, you won't care, you will be thinking of your lov—"

"Hush, you naughty Lotty; why should I love you less?"

"I might have guessed what was going to happen, if I had had the sense of a mouse, and then I could have warned you, Margaret."

"Against what, Lotty?"

"Marrying Sir Harold Leigh. I know some one who loves you much better—"

"Lotty, Lotty!"

"And so this is the reason we have been asked so often to your house, this half year, and Sir Harold always there; and thus it comes you like to talk of horses and dogs, and I, like a goose, listening to it all so unsuspiciously. I don't deserve to be Charlotte Beauvilliers."

CHAPTER II.

MARGARET was the only child left to her parents out of many, and had been born in their old age as it were.

Some of their children had married and left descendants, but the affection they had bestowed alike on son and daughter, was now wholly concentrated on the blooming girl of eighteen. Not even his fine sturdy grandsons (all that remained to him of his first-born son) could rival, in old Sir Thomas's eyes, the shadow of his daughter's form; while "Margaret, my Margaret, sweet Margaret," formed the pith of all Lady Montagu's conversation.

To lose nothing of her sweet company, they had for the last five years lived in Bath, where Margaret could have the advantage of masters and companions of her own age. They were so unselfish in their love, they would not tie her merry spirit down to their aged fire-side, but lovingly said to each other, "What have we now to live for, but to make our Margaret happy?"

In the merry companionship of her school-mates, the gentle, quiet home of her parents, Margaret had grown up, the simplest, most innocent-hearted girl, as she was almost the prettiest and best. She had but just experienced her first sorrow, namely, that she was to leave school, and part with her girlhood's friends, unknowing if they might meet again, when she made that abrupt entry into the school-room, with the announcement that was almost as startling to her as to them. In their daily school walks, the girls were aware (as what girls are not) that they attracted much attention.

Some were keenly alive to it, as Augusta, Florence, and Caroline; others scarcely noticed it, as Margaret and Millicent; again, little turbulent spirits like Lotty's, were indignant at such implied rudeness.

Certainly, the little jealous school-husband had cause for being irate. No sooner did the school emerge from the house-door, all bonneted and shawled, escorted by, and under, the strict surveillance of the English and French governesses, than the handsomest man in Bath came curvetting down the street on the most beautiful horse in the town.

Slowly, at a funereal pace, went the well-trained steed, by the long two-and-two line; the rider's eyes generally rivetted, as Lotty indignantly declared, on Margaret; as Augusta exultingly believed, on herself. The gaze (if she caught it) but deepened the bloom on Margaret's cheek; but she was too much engaged to attend to it. This was her time for telling stories to the little girls, and at present

the tale was most alarmingly interesting, and was duly repeated at night by the one favoured little maiden, who heard it from the fountain's head, to the others, when supposed to be innocently sleeping.

Sir Harold might have been satisfied had he been able to gain as much of Margaret's attention as he did of Augusta's. But after six weeks' gazing, he found he made no advance, so he contrived an introduction to Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu.

There he certainly was in the same room with the lovely face which had so rivetted his attention as to make him forget hunting, racing, and steeple-chasing, and all other sports so dear to his heart. But he did not make much way.

In fact, being an experienced man of the world, having been courted, flattered, spoilt, and made much of, he could not understand the shy, sensitive heart, that belonged to the prettiest face he had ever seen.

One evening, after devoting a whole hour to entertaining Margaret with stories of his horses and dogs, and seeing, with pleasure, how her shy eyes began furtively to glance up into his, with evident interest; how they rested for full ten seconds on his face, giving him time to see how dark and soft they were, when he told of his favourite horse's love for him; how the half smile was beginning to break into irrepressible dimples, and the rosy lips to give glimpses of the little white teeth within, he was wholly unprepared for the unrestrained look of delight with which she sprang from this most interesting conversation to greet her school-fellows.

They had been invited to tea that evening: and as the stately Augusta swam into the seat Margaret had so willingly vacated, he pished and pshawed himself into a vile humour, and determined to be revenged. So he devoted himself entirely to Augusta, and when he glanced round now and then, to see if the

lesson were taking effect, his state of mind was not improved, by discovering that nobody seemed to be caring in the least how he and Augusta were amusing themselves.

Lotty, Milly, Carry, and Flo., were all in high glee, and Margaret the merriest among them; but there was a glow on her cheek, and a light in her eyes, which made Harold fancy, that, without knowing it, she was happy in his evident attentions.

Notwithstanding, she did not seem the least affected by his flirtation with Augusta.

He overheard her telling them about his horse, and was sensible of such a pleasurable emotion thereat, that he did not heed Augusta in the very middle of a sentimental harangue, and her evident discomposure became apparent to Carry and Flo., much to the gratification of those two worthy young ladies.

As he went away, Margaret raised her fawn's eyes, and said, in a low, shy voice,

"Will you ride that horse when you pass us again?"

"With great pleasure," he answered, in nearly as low a voice; but his heart bounded, and he was glad to rush out into the street, and then away into the fields, under the broad moonlight, to give some scope to his joy.

"To think, after having passed unscathed through all the courts of Europe, that I should at last be caught by a simple school-girl. She is so fresh, so shy, so natural; what soft, loving glances, she gives her father and mother; she must be mine; I am too impatient to wait longer. Besides, if I do not provide myself with a decisive impediment, in the shape of a wife, Augusta Clare will marry me by force. Nevertheless, if I speak to Margaret, I know I shall undo the work of the last six weeks; her shy nature will prompt her to reject me at once. I will call on Sir Thomas to-morrow, and state all my wishes and intentions; and I will ask his consent to

visit them constantly, with the avowed intention of making myself acceptable to his sweet daughter. I knew I was not mistaken the first time I saw her walking; such a lovely figure, such a perfect walker, so light and elegant, yet so firm and dignified. I admired the walk for a whole week before I saw the face, and when she becomes frank and open with me, as she is with her father and mother, and when I am permitted to excite and join in the happy gladness of her spirit, how like a sunbeam she will prove. Ah! how she will brighten up our dull, stately home, where my mother rules at present, with Prudence and Propriety, as I call my two sisters. And my mother, she must be pleased with her! for who could resist sweet Margaret? while Pru. and Pro. will learn to look upon her as a stray star, wandering there solely to enliven and shine upon them. I believe the dullness of home has hitherto alarmed me with regard to matrimony, devoutly as my mother has

wished for such an event. I shall certainly speak to Sir Thomas to-morrow. Her eyes are like brown velvet, and all her movements the perfection of lady-like grace. Sweet Margaret! I could never be unhappy with you."

CHAPTER III.

HAROLD fulfilled his overnight intentions. Now it cannot be denied that Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu were more grieved than pleased at his communication, albeit that the matter was so flattering to their Margaret.

"She is so young," pleaded the father.

"She is our only one," murmured the mother.

"We hoped to keep her always," said Sir Thomas.

"We cannot expect to live much longer," sighed Lady Montagu.

Harold was sensibly affected. Notwith-

standing a very good heart, he was unaccustomed to consult any other wishes than his own; and he did not see why, because they were so alive to the merits of their Margaret, they should insist upon keeping such a charming thing all to themselves.

"I grant she is very young," said Harold; "but I dare say it will be six months and more before she will permit me to be sufficiently intimate to begin to make love, much less tell her so. Though I have now seen her every day for six weeks, I have never even shaken hands with her, and she never voluntarily spoke to me until last night."

"True, very true," said Sir Thomas; "our Margaret is very shy."

"She is very timid, I know, in some things," said Lady Montagu.

"All I wish to do now, is to gain your permission to try and win her affections. Knowing how my feelings were warming towards her, I could not visit at your house

without informing you of my hopes and intentions," said Harold.

"Very honourable indeed, I must say," said Sir Thomas. "My dear Anne, Sir Harold is a man of honour."

"Indeed he is, and we ought to be grateful, I am sure," said Lady Montagu, looking just the contrary. "He comes of a very good family, Sir Thomas, I know, for your mother I remember very well, Sir Harold; she was lady-in-waiting to good Queen Charlotte, and amid all the state and reserve of that court, she ever bore the palm of the most dignified and discreet."

Harold bowed at this praise of his mother, while he mentally said, "No wonder my mother is so stiff and stately, and Leigh Court so dull and precise. If I succeed in gaining her affections, I do not see why you should not come and live near us," he continued aloud.

"Dear, dear," said Lady Montagu, "you

are too quick, you anticipate too much, Sir Harold. Margaret may not perhaps like you," continued she, brightening up.

Harold smiled; certainly a smile of self-satisfied import; nevertheless he replied, "Perhaps not."

"Well, well," said Sir Thomas, "now let us drop the subject, it makes me nervous and fretful. But you are an honourable young man, Sir Harold, and we ought to be obliged to you, though we do not exactly feel so."

"Then I may visit the house, and try to win Miss Montagu's heart, if I can?" said Harold.

"Yes, I suppose so. I suppose we must not stand in her light, we must let her judge for herself, poor pet; but I hope you may think better of it. I truly hope you may see another face that you like better than our Margaret's."

So Sir Harold took his leave, none the less anxious to obtain the dear Margaret from the difficulty there seemed to be about it.

"My dear Anne," said Sir Thomas, after their visitor had departed, "I will tell you what we will do. We must ask all Margaret's prettiest school-fellows here; you must find out all the belles of Bath, and on the evenings that Sir Harold is here, we will surround him with such pretty faces, that he will not see our sunny Margaret, the light of our old age."

"A very good idea, Sir Thomas, and I will also renew my acquaintance with Lady Katherine; she may not perhaps like the connection; our Margaret may be too simple and natural for such a grand lady, and she may forbid the marriage. I have always heard that her son was very dutiful, and she, I know, carries duty, etiquette, and propriety to the extreme verge, and has always kept her children in full order."

"It seems to me, Anne, that we are becoming two selfish, hypocritical people in our old age; but if we lose our Margaret, I think our business in this world is well nigh over."

"I shall feel as if it were, I am sure," said Lady Montagu, her tears falling; "nevertheless, we will bear everything, so that sweet Meg is happy. We will hope that she loves her old father and mother too fondly to wish to leave them so soon. I will always ask that pretty Miss Clare here with her; she seems greatly taken with Sir Harold, and is, in manners and appearance, much more fitted for a great lady than our Margaret."

Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu were simple-minded, good, kind people. They thought themselves very treacherous and hypocritical, inviting all the prettiest girls in the neighbourhood to meet the wolf that had come to steal their lamb, and yet it never occurred to them that they had a much surer way of keeping their Margaret than the means they now employed. They had but to say, or even do no more than imply, that they hoped, while their little span of life lasted, that she would remain with them, and the warm, sensitive

heart would have responded instantly. All the lovers in Christendom, were they handsomer than Adonis, and more amiable and devoted than the knights of old, could not have obtained entrance to Margaret's heart, with her parents' wishes to guard the door.

But they had never allowed her to know how necessary she was to their happiness; in their unselfish love, they had ever placed her little pleasures and wishes as completely separated from theirs; yet, at the same time, were so anxious that she should enjoy them. Margaret, if she ever thought on the subject, might have imagined they considered her a grandchild rather than a daughter.

Once or twice circumstances had so occurred as to make Margaret think, "How sorry mamma must be that I am so young, and that I was not born about the same time as my other sisters." She was so simple, modest, and humble, that it never entered her innocent mind she was the cynosure of any

circle, and with such natures it is not difficult to believe, that when once they are aware of the fact, once they feel the value of their love to another, death alone can extinguish the feeling thus awakened, the grave only do away with these first impressions.

It was so with Margaret. By degrees she became aware that she was an object of interest to another; she, who thought it so good of everybody to love her; so kind of her father to let her kneel by his chair, and play with his white curls; so good of her mother to allow her to fly over the house on all sorts of messages.

At first she confided to her school-husband that it would be very nice if Sir Harold was her brother, then he could call her Margaret, without saying that formal "Miss Montagu."

"And I suppose you would call him Harold?" said the little fiery school-husband.

"Yes, of course," said Margaret; "Harold, not Sir Harold; it sounds very nice, does it not, Lotty?"

"No, it sounds very forward and Augusta-ish of you, and I won't allow you to do it."

"Oh no," said Margaret, "not for the world—how could you think I would do it?"

So thus it came to pass, that the experienced man of the world gained his end, against the simple, unworldly-wise old couple; and thus it came to pass, that Margaret uttered the memorable speech, half hidden by the school-room door; and also thus it happened, Miss Augusta Clare had a little method in her madness, when she promulgated the fact, that she intended to marry Sir Harold herself. She had met him quite as often as Margaret, according to old Sir Thomas's base arrangement, and she had talked to him a great deal more.

For whereas Margaret was very shy, retiring and difficult of access, Augusta took an ell for every one of Sir Harold's inches, and made the most of *them*.

CHAPTER IV.

So Margaret accepted Sir Harold, and the wedding-day was fixed, she, all unknowing of the blank that now fell on her aged parents' existence, while they, as heretofore, studiously concealed from her anything but their warm interest in her happiness, and seemed to take such a pride and delight in her trousseau, carriages, horses, and bridesmaids, that Margaret could only say to herself, "They will be so happy together, now they have no wild girl to trouble them; and I hope my Harold and I may be like them when we grow old."

Nothing could exceed the stately conde-

scension with which Lady Katherine Leigh received her intended daughter-in-law; and the pale Pru. absolutely kissed the bright girl with fervour, while the meek, quiet Pro. became quite flushed and animated, on hearing they were to be bridesmaids.

Although of an antique age compared to Margaret, being some years older even than their brother, Pru. and Pro. (whose real names were Charlotte and Georgina, in reverential memory of the Court, wherein Lady Katherine shone so conspicuously), were still considered young girls by their courtly mamma.

They always walked behind her, like two model maids of honour, attendant on a despotic sovereign; they curtsied on leaving her gracious presence, they asked permission to take the air, and even to the colour of their dresses and ribbons, all was deferred to their mother. Pru. had once indulged in a little flight of emancipation, which led to the dis-

covery, that she had absolutely been seen speaking, upon several occasions, to the curate.

Urged by incipient love, Pru. feebly chirped forth that "he was a very good young man." The shade of Queen Charlotte rose before the indignant mother, but history does not say how Pru. was brought to reason. Doubtless, the way was stringent, for the cure was effectual; Pru. and Pro. were never seen to speak voluntarily after that to any man under eighty years of age.

Sir Harold was very generous. He presented each bridesmaid with her dress complete, and a turquoise ring; but Lotty was firm in her determination not to be one of these favoured mortals, which Florence and Caroline, with more candour than politeness, told her was a very good thing, as there would have been an odd bridesmaid; now, the numbers were even.

"I don't care how odd I am," said Lotty, taking the matter literally.

Neither the policeman nor the postman having proposed, as Florence and Caroline maliciously hinted, Augusta was able to officiate as bridesmaid. The two former were so far justified in their unlady-like remarks, that Augusta's cupidity, in the way of admiration, made her swallow anything from anybody that fed her vanity. She was a beautiful girl, very fair, with sunny hair flowing in thick curls over cheeks quite rivalling the peach in bloom. A fine, tall figure, rounded in proportion, with the utmost grace; and a bewitching, sweet, taking manner, that would beguile a weak man of his heart at first sight. Her eyes were peculiarly beautiful, the lids so white and full; the eyelashes almost black, and the orbs themselves of a clear blue.

Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu might well have hoped, that a being so gifted by Nature, would prove more attractive than their simple, pretty Margaret. But a true man of the world will only give his heart into Nature's

keeping. He laughs, talks, sentimentalizes with beings like Augusta; he places his heart in the keeping of a loving, simple nature like Margaret's.

So the wedding-day came, and Lotty agreed she would take care of Sir Thomas while the others were at church.

"He and I do not approve of the marriage," said Lotty, with dignity; "though I allow Harold is not a bad fellow; he has promised me a son of Lucifer's, and he will be rising five about the time I leave school, which will be the thing just."

"Did one ever hear such language!" said Flo. to Carry, as they arranged each other's dresses.

Lady Montagu would fain have remained at home with her husband; her heart felt ill at ease, and only her utter forgetfulness of self made her attempt the exertion. She could not but think of the three daughters she had already seen married under the hap-

piest auspices, and now they were no more Was this to be the fate of the youngest, most gifted, most beloved?

"God's will be done!" she whispered to herself many times; and often she had to appeal to the same gracious help for strength to support this day, without the loved object of her unselfish affections perceiving on this, which ought to be the happiest day of her life, the sorrow they were suffering.

Poor Sir Thomas shook with suppressed emotion as the gentle, fair girl knelt for his blessing, before proceeding to the church, while she felt—as what bride has not?—that it was agony to leave her childhood's home for an untried affection, a new existence.

"If papa would but say, 'Stay, my child,' I could not, would not, leave him," said she, to herself.

But the good old man fondly kissed her, and exerting himself for her sake, that she might not see his grief and sorrow, he feebly made an attempt at cheerfulness, saying,

"My darling will be Lady Leigh when I again see her."

Lotty, with tearful eyes, did her best to cheer his spirits, as the fair vision, white as marble, passed from his sight.

"Sir Harold loves her very much, no doubt," said she, "though no one can love her as we do, can they, Sir Thomas?"

"No! no! not as her fond old parents do."

"And I, Sir Thomas, too!" said Lotty, with a little acrimony; "but though Sir Harold is a very good fellow, I wish we had not let her marry so soon, because I know of a much better match for her."

"My dear, what are you saying?" said the old man, who was beginning to think Lotty's mode of consolation none of the best.

"I think if Margaret had waited until Basil Erle had come home, he would have asked her to marry him. I don't know much about love-matters, but I am almost sure,

when we were all staying with you last holidays, Basil was falling into downright love with Margaret; and you know what Basil is, such a fellow!"

"My dear boy!" said Sir Thomas, "I believe, indeed, there are few like him."

The old man, between grief, the tears that blinded his eyes, and Lotty's peculiar style of conversation, was becoming oblivious of the sex of his companion.

Lotty flushed up, and then continued in a softer voice,

"Basil is just as good a man as Millicent is a woman, they are a worthy brother and sister; and though I am very young, Sir Thomas, not more than fifteen, I have seen a great deal of life, and of men, and I never saw any one like Basil. I don't like men in general, excepting the Beauvilliers; I think them stupid, egotistical fel—creatures I mean; but if Margaret had waited to marry Basil, then she would have lived all her life close

to you, and that would have been much better."

"Very, very true, but I never heard that Basil wanted our Margaret," said poor Sir Thomas.

"Well, he never did say so, more's the pity; he might have guessed before he went abroad that every man who ever saw Margaret would want to marry her. I am sure I should."

"And why did you not say so, my dear? for if you had, then, perhaps, you would not have minded living with us."

"No! I should have liked it of all things; but I should not have been good enough for Margaret; only Basil is."

"But when did he propose, my dear?"

"He never did, Sir Thomas, and that's the worst of it, and I know he will be dreadfully unhappy when he hears Margaret is married. Perhaps he will kill himself, though I think he is too sensible for that. But I will tell

you how I know. I love Margaret better than any other woman in the world, I don't mind telling you, Sir Thomas."

"She deserves it, my dear boy! she deserves every one's love."

Lotty winced again, and again modulated her voice to a lady-like pitch.

"So, loving Margaret as I did, I soon saw who loved her besides; and I felt that my love was just a grain of sand to what Basil could give, and I dare say he would have told Margaret, but then she was a school-girl. Besides, you know what a bad character his father bears, and what a wretch Lady Erlscourt is, so I suppose he thought it wrong to take Margaret to such a house as that."

"But they could have lived with us, my dear, and Basil is such a good young man," sighed Sir Thomas.

"'Good,' does not express what he is," returned Lotty; "but it is too late now; here they are all coming back from church."

"Well, God's will be done! I hope we have acted for the best," said Sir Thomas.

"We might have done better, I think," replied the sorry little comforter.

"What will Anne say? she is so fond of those two, Basil and Millicent; I doubt we have been too hasty, Margaret was too young, yes, too young to marry. I thought that, Anne. Anne, we were too hasty. Dear me, dear me!" And the poor old man sobbed aloud.

"For goodness sake, don't do that," exclaimed the alarmed Lotty, "they will think I have been beating you. And here is Lady Montagu being carried in as if she had fainted."

Startled out of his grief, Sir Thomas hurried out to meet the poor mother, and being both utterly unable to control their feelings longer, they fell sobbing into each others' arms.

Alarmed at this unwonted display, Margaret flew to them from her husband's arm.

"Oh, mamma! papa! oh, mamma! papa!" was all she could say at first.

"I will not leave you. I cannot go: My own dear father and mother, bid your Margaret stay ever with you."

"Oh, hush, dear Meg," whispered Milly; "remember the vows you have just pronounced."

"But papa! mamma! my kind, loving parents. Can this grief be for me? is it my loss they mourn thus? Oh, Milly, I must not, cannot leave them."

"Remember, dearest, they may be overcome with the recollection of your sisters. See, Harold wonders at you. Let them grieve a little. Leave them to themselves, for none know what their loving hearts have suffered."

Lotty and Millicent led the afflicted parents into another room, while Harold drew Margaret aside, and whispered fond, endearing words to her, saying that now she was his, her word should be his law; and if she wished to stay with her parents, she should; she had only to name her wishes and he would consent.

Margaret raised the seldom-seen eyes to his face. In the one short glance he read the world of love she could bestow. The sensitive maiden heart opened to let the wife's devotion enter, and Harold knew that the grave alone could extinguish the love expressed in that glance. Proud and elated, he continued, as he folded her in his arms, "God forbid, my sweet wife, that my first act as a husband should be to take you from your parents: go, settle with them what you like; what pleases you, will do the same by me."

But the constant habits of forbearance which they practised, shortly came to the aid of the fond father and mother.

Margaret was permitted to think that a tide of old recollections had overcome them, though she could not avoid seeing the extent to which they mourned for her.

It was agreed, that instead of going abroad, the bride and bridegroom should return in a short time to the old hall of her father, "Mon-

tague House," and in looking forward to this speedy reunion, they were enabled to bid their darling "God speed:" while she left them in some degree comforted, more than all recollecting the kind and loving way in which her Harold had come forward, when he might have resented her first conjugal act. In her heart of hearts she promised him her life's devotions. We must trace her through it, and in the meantime wonder, if, like Lotty, we shall say at the close of it,—

"Margaret was very foolish not to wait for Basil."

CHAPTER V.

I THINK we ought to learn who "Basil" and "Millicent" are.

On the borders of the New Forest in Hampshire, rose the stately towers of Lord Erlscourt's castle.

The family were neither old nor particularly wealthy, so that the persent lord did not disdain the appointment of Ranger of the Forest. He had married, early in life, a very beautiful and amiable woman of high rank and some wealth. During her lifetime the family were much loved and respected, and the embarrassed estates (left so by the present lord's

predecessor), under her judicious sway were becoming free and unencumbered. Unfortunately for her husband and the estates, still more for her children, she died from the effects of a low, lingering fever, that often hangs about a densely-wooded country. Either soured by her loss, or losing that restraint which her fine and noble character intuitively put upon one very much the reverse, Lord Erlscourt became a very different man.

He grew careless and indifferent about his habits and appearance. He became mixed up with a number of very questionable characters, and report was rife with tales of his midnight doings; when, instead of putting down the lawless poaching and glaring thefts of wood, he was described as head poacher and principal thief.

He consummated the ruin of his character as a gentleman and an honourable man, by marrying a handsome but vulgar girl, niece to one of his under officers, whose former life could by no means bear an inspection.

Elated by her unexpected rise in life, the new Lady Erlscourt added to other disagreeable qualities, so much vanity and overweening pride, as to disgust even those of her own grade. With the low vulgarity of a small mind, and the vindictiveness of a very base one, she poured upon the heads of her unfortunate step-children so much mean and petty persecution, that Basil, the boy, ran away.

He was then about ten years old, and his little heart beat and swelled with indignation at the treatment both he and his gentle sister had borne; the bitter wrong caused him to reason and think with premature wisdom.

"I am very strong for my age," said the little fellow to himself, "and I know the wood paths in every direction. I shall go to-night as far as the hollow oak, and in the morning I will strike up to the left, and if I run as well as walk, I shall be at Montague House by ten o'clock. I will tell Sir Thomas what we have to endure. I shall ask him to send for Milly.

I shall refuse ever to return to my father's house unless she is released; then, if they will not let her come, I shall ask Sir Thomas to take me before a magistrate, and I will swear, swear solemnly by that great God who has made our own mother an angel in heaven, that we are starved, beaten, and ill treated, and Sir Thomas must write to grandpapa."

Thus soliloquising, the little fellow ran with unabated energy and speed towards his intended resting-place. He felt no fear at passing the long night in the dark woods. He remembered nothing but his little sister's cries of agony at her stepmother's harsh treatment, and when he reached the old oak tree, he knelt upon the rustling bed of leaves at the foot, and prayed the Lord God of Heaven to assist him in his designs, and whispered to himself, as he climbed up into his resting-place, "My dear, angel mother will watch me while I sleep."

And he slept the sound sleep of the innocent; nevertheless the important step he was

about to take, seemed to move him in his sleep, for he awoke at the first faint streak of light that came stealing through the trees. Hastily descending (for he seemed to know intuitively that Lady Erlscourt would never let him escape, and that the knowledge of his flight would only make her the more determined to get him again into her power), he lost no time in pursuing his way. Every nerve braced by the fear of being captured; every instinct startled by the danger, into forethought and judgment, with very few mistakes, the little fellow at last saw Montague House before him.

Faint and exhausted, he made one last effort, and as he did so, he heard in the woods he had just left, the cracking of whips and shouting of men, which thrilled him with the knowledge that the pursuers were on his track.

The large window of the breakfast room at Montague House was wide open, and as Basil approached, he saw it was full of people.

"I am unable to say a word, I am so ill and

faint, and those people will be here ere I can tell all, and I shall be taken back. Oh! mother, mother, why did you die and leave your poor children!"

At this moment he saw, not ten yards from him, a little girl, who was gazing at him with unbounded amazement. Basil sprang forward, and grasped her dress.

"Do you hear those people in the wood?" he gasped breathlessly. "And that noise? they are looking for me."

"Why do you run from them?" she answered.

"Because they beat and ill-used me, and I have run this morning many miles to tell Sir Thomas Montagu; but I am so tired and faint —they will be here before I can do so—will you hide me until they go?"

"Yes, yes," said the little girl, "come with me."

They ran together down a gravel walk which led to a conservatory, from thence a narrow

staircase wound up to the highest story of the old-fashioned Elizabethan house.

Holding his hand fast, she darted into a large sort of empty lumber-room, and bidding him lock himself in, said,

"I shall get you some milk."

She ran down stairs again, locking the last door as well as she could, and entered the large open window just as the cavalcade of horsemen appeared upon the lawn.

There was no mistaking Sir Thomas Montagu's utter ignorance as to any fugitive having been seen near his house: besides, it was almost incredible that a boy of such tender age could have travelled so far without food or help. So that the party prepared to depart just as the little girl had collected her portion of breakfast, and was asking permission to eat it out of doors. This being granted, she but waited to see them fairly away, ere she tripped up first with a cup of milk.

Her prisoner had not locked the door, he

was lying in a deep, exhausted faint on the floor.

"Mamma! mamma!" said the little fairy thing, as she flew down the house stairs; "come with me, I want you."

Her mother could not resist the earnest appeal.

"Don't tell papa yet, pray don't. I promised I would not, it is such a secret! Dear mamma! you must wait until he is well, that he may tell you everything himself."

In much amazement Lady Montagu listened to the talk of her little girl, and fairly cried out when she saw the beautiful, pale face of an apparently dead boy. Comprehending in a moment what her little girl only half understood, she lifted up the worn-out frame, and carrying it tenderly into her own room, she laid it on a bed. Then the fleet-footed little maiden ran hither and thither, according to her mother's directions, for restoratives, her excitement rendered double by the fact that it was her

secret and hers only. She was standing eagerly watching her mother's face as she bathed the broad, fair brow, and poured the tiny restorative drops between the colourless lips.

A sigh, a shiver through the limbs. The large, beautiful eyes opened for a moment, and gazed on the kind face bending over him.

"Mother," he faintly said and smiled, and seemed to die away again.

But Lady Montagu redoubled her efforts, and again consciousness seemed to be restored. The eyes opened and looked enquiringly, first on her, and then fell on the little girl; a colour flushed his face, he tried to stretch out his hand, but was too weak. But the lips opened, and with a smile of ineffable sweetness he half whispered, "Basil thanks you." And this was the first meeting of Margaret and Basil.

It is needless to say that as soon as Basil could tell his tale, Sir Thomas was quite ready to listen to it; and acted with so much judgment and discretion in the matter, that no

alternative remained to the weak and reprehensible father, but to yield up his children to their grandfather's care and protection. The conduct of Lady Erlscourt was so well known and notorious, that they were glad to hush the matter up anyhow.

And thus it fell out that the two poor ill-used children came to have an honoured and happy home, and received the education their rare and fine qualities deserved. And fortunately this time continued until Basil was nineteen, just two years before Margaret's marriage.

At that time their grandfather died, and then came a chequered and trying season, which served to prove that the spirit of the mother had fallen on the children, and that they were meant to bear the burthens of life with the lofty, firm faith of Christians.

CHAPTER VI.

Lotty, or rather Charlotte Beauvilliers, must not be passed cursorily over, as if a thing as small in importance as she was in person. Margaret's little school-husband was born of a peculiar people, and in a peculiar manner, as befits a heroine.

The Beauvilliers were a race of strong, sturdy, Britons; true hearts of oak dwelt in their fine, athletic frames; and as is often the case, under gigantic proportions simple and kind hearts are to be found, so it was with them. Fearless, guileless, frank and ingenuous, no one ever heard that a Beauvilliers did an

action of which he was ashamed. Perhaps no great intellect was to be found among them, but warm-hearted, generous deeds followed their steps. And for no virtue were they more conspicuous than for family love. Brothers dwelt side by side, and seemed to love each other more, the closer they lived together. Large families were brought up in love and amity; none ever heard a Beauvilliers use a harsh word or say an unkind thing. A jovial, hilarious, vigorous race, they bound themselves to the country and soil, eschewing towns and professions, as something of another sphere than theirs.

Those who were rich enough, hunted, shot, and fished; those who were not, farmed, dug, delved and planted; none were absolutely poor, and none were more than commonly rich. They had no expensive wants, but were generally remarkable for their simple tastes.

One other peculiarity existed in the race of

Beauvilliers, the preponderance of males in the family; a girl was now and then born, but they were so scarce, that they were considered as sorts of natural curiosities, and treated accordingly.

About fifty years before our story commences, one Beauvilliers, larger, taller, stronger than the rest, with an extra portion of bonhommie and kindness, had been made, through these gifts, a sort of head of the family; he rejoiced in six sons. When he died, the eldest of these was worthily appointed to fill his place, being the true scion of his fine, old, jovial father; and he had six sons, all true Beauvillians. The youngest of these, at the age of eight years, was found thrashing a boy twice his size, for ill treating a little girl; and he was brought into the parlour, flushed with excitement, and covered with blood and glory.

"Really," said his mother, "I think it is full time Norman went to school."

"He is our youngest, Belle," said the father. "Let us keep him with us a little longer, to warm our old hearts; we might get rusty and cold, wife, with no boys to trouble us."

"I have some idea he will not be the youngest long," said Mrs. Beauvilliers, with a rising flush on her cheeks.

"What now, Belle! more boys coming?" exclaimed the jovial father. "That's capital, I never heard better news in my life; what will Ned, Will, and Charlie say? Seven boys! why, I shall outdo my father. I always thought there never was a woman in this world like you, Belle, and I think so to this minute. Odds me! but I must write the news off, and invite them all to the christening."

"No, no, my dear husband, have compassion on me; remember, 'there is many a slip between the cup and the lip,' and don't get a christening dinner ready, till you have a child to christen. Pray think how long

it is since such an event occurred here, and that I am very nearly as much surprised as you are, and rather put out too."

Mrs. Beauvilliers was a clever, talented woman; she had just the sort of calm, excellent good sense, which it was desirable to graft on the stock of the kind-hearted, though somewhat heedless Beauvillians. Throughout the whole clan she reigned pre-eminent in worth and talents, and received a sort of feudal adoration from the simple-hearted race.

Mr. Beauvilliers could not forbear letting out the secret of his expected blessing, to all his brothers, each in strict confidence; and therefore they were all prepared with rounds of congratulations and hearty good wishes on the happy advent.

But all the five uncles, all the six little expectant brothers, all the cousins, nephews, kinsmen of every degree, were thrown into a state of profound amazement.

The expected seventh boy proved a little, small girl!

As soon as they had recovered from the astounding fact, a regular commotion ensued among the clan of Beauvilliers. No two remained long in the same place; they hunted each other up far and near, merely to shake hands and say, "We have got a girl."

The fine old family mansion of Beau-court, where the wonderful event occurred, was besieged with every Beauvilliers that had ever been heard of: only to see the happy father, shake hands, and mutually say, "We have got a girl!"

At the christening (the like of which had never been seen before), the girl was handed round, as Newman Noggs hath it, "as if it were something to eat." Perhaps a pervading feeling of disappointment might have gone through the company, on perceiving that the baby girl was not at all unlike what some of the baby boys had been. "But smaller, oh, yes! decidedly smaller," as some said, with confident satisfaction. Upon the whole,

the affair went off admirably. When the girl was handed from one to another, it gazed from face to face with wise little eyes, which made everybody declare, that the girl was the most sensible child that had ever been born.

When the holy water was dashed in its face rather violently, (as it was then beginning to be thought the proper thing to do,) the girl neither started nor winced, but opened her eyes, and fixed them with a sort of questioning wonder on the clergyman. Whereupon everybody thought, "The girl is a true Beauvilliers, and does not know what fear is."

The amount of presents which it was esteemed necessary to bestow upon the girl, made her a little heiress on the spot.

She might have set up a shop of corals and bells only; she might have turned silversmith and dealt in silver mugs, tiny knives and forks, in red morocco, and every other sort of case; she might have opened an account with her bankers, and put out her money at in-

terest ; she might have been smothered beneath the weight of gold chains and coral necklaces.

As for her nurse, she was looked upon as a peculiar person of the angel species, and came in for her share of presents, until she bent under the accumulation of gowns, shawls, and new guineas.

CHAPTER VII.

It became a sort of custom among the nearer relatives, to make periodical journeys to Beau-court, to see how the girl was getting on; and as no one ever came empty-handed, her possessions were becoming vast.

As she grew older, the sort of notice and homage she received might have proved very injurious; but she had one Beauvillian peculiarity, an adoration of her mother.

Her word was law, her look a command; and being so talented and clever, the little girl reaped all the benefit of such an affection. Mrs. Beauvilliers became aware that her

daughter was of a very peculiar character; and while she wondered how such a disposition would make its way in the world, she could not but admire the fearless, independent spirit, the extreme truthfulness of her words and actions; Lotty's word might be relied on as certainly as the sun travels from east to west.

Of course it must be allowed that her education was of a more manly description than befits a young lady. Each brother was anxious to impart some of his knowledge in the bold sports of the Beauvillians; each uncle enquired diligently after her progress in riding, leaping, and jumping; nevertheless they looked with reverence and delight upon all Mrs. Beauvilliers' feminine accomplishments; and when Lotty, escorted by her six brothers, brought down, on her father's birthday, a silk pocket-handkerchief hemmed by herself, the sensation it caused was wonderful.

"Here, papa, is my present; I hemmed it myself; mamma says it is pretty well done,

and I have only been three weeks to-morrow doing it."

"Yes, papa, this is our Lotty's hemming," said one brother.

"Only three weeks to morrow doing it," continued another.

"Look well at it, papa," exclaimed a third.

"Mamma says it's well done," said the fourth.

"No, only pretty well!" said the matter-of-fact Lotty.

Papa looked at it with an admiration and delight that quite satisfied the six brothers; then the handkerchief was put away, but upon the arrival of any fresh Beauvilliers, it was brought out, shown, and admired, and that Beauvilliers went away, and to the next Beauvilliers he met, he told the news.

"Our girl has hemmed a handkerchief, in three weeks all but a day, and it is pretty well done."

Whereupon that Beauvilliers went to see it,

until the whole clan had been favoured with a view thereof.

Much to the detriment of the beloved little girl, after a short illness, Mrs. Beauvilliers died, just when her daughter was of the age when she would most want her cares and attention.

As she felt her end drawing near, she called for the little idolized being, now about twelve years old. Generally calm and self-possessed in a remarkable degree, Lotty was taken to her mother, convulsed with grief.

"Take me with you, mother! take me with you!" she rather screamed out than said. But that soft, low voice calmed her in a moment.

"God sees fit to separate us, my child; murmur not, but rather strive to obey His will, that we may meet again. Now, my Lotty, listen to your mother's last words; they need be but few to you, thank God: 'Know your duty, and do it.'"

"I will try, mamma; I promise."

"Then that is enough; and now remember, papa suffers a greater loss than you do. You must, instead of grieving, comfort him. That is your present duty."

"I will, mamma."

"I shall wish you to go to school, Lotty."

"Oh, mamma!"

"I wish it, Lotty."

"I shall go, mamma."

"You will not forget, my child, that you are a woman—a lady. As the men of the Beauvilliers' race are strong and manly, so must the women show themselves gentle and feminine."

"I will try, mamma."

But the child's heart was older in its affections, deeper and stronger in its love, than even her mother knew.

A cold dew covered her, the room and the dying mother faded from her sight, her dark eyes, remarkable for their brilliant beauty, grew dull, and closed.

"I die with mamma," she thought, happily

kissing her passionately. The poor mother collected her remaining strength to fold the little senseless form in her fond embrace, and long before the broken-hearted Lotty recovered from her swoon, her mother's spirit was in heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

Six months after this event, Lotty and her father were out on their daily ride.

It was the habit of the little girl on these occasions (though usually silent) to say, if she saw her father's head drooping with sorrowful recollections, or the tears gathering in his eyes, "Papa, do you think I can manage that hedge?" If he said, "Yes, Lotty," the spirited little rider, with her faultless pony, got over it somehow.

And in admiring his child's courage and skill, poor Mr. Beauvilliers would rouse himself for a little while.

When the head again drooped, again the little voice was heard, "Papa, in that meadow we can have a good gallop, with the brook to jump at the bottom."

So papa and the fearless little daughter proceeded to perform the feat, to both their entire satisfaction.

It was thus that Lotty strove to remember her mother's last words, and fulfil her present duty. But, on this particular day, her voice was low and trembling, and she said, seeing her father more cheerful than usual,

"Papa, I am to go to school."

Poor little magnanimous Lotty! School was to her, in imagination, the fearful gaol that the thief sees always before him, or the distant, banished land which the convict would almost prefer death to beholding.

"Ah! my Lotty, are you tired of your fond father?"

"No!" said Lotty, with energy.

So they trotted, side by side, for a mile or

two, meeting now and then an admiring kinsman, who, briefly saluting the afflicted pair, would yet turn round and watch them with loving eyes, as long as they were in sight.

"Papa," said Lotty, "can I go to a school so near you that I may ride over to see you every day?"

"Ride, my pet; I never yet heard of a school where they allowed a girl to keep her pony," returned her father.

Such an appalling fact sent the blood straight from Lotty's face to her heart. That going to school should be a bar to riding, and cause a total separation between herself and those she most loved, well nigh overcame every restraint she had put upon herself, almost breaking open all those hidden sluices of grief that she had so carefully concealed from her father.

She was so absorbed that she did not perceive that her father was in nearly the same state as herself.

Giving her little spirited pony a touch of

the whip, he reared, plunged, and kicked, causing Mr. Beauvilliers such alarm lest he should unseat his rider, that Lotty saw the fit of grief had passed by.

So she patted Midge on the neck, spoke to and coaxed him; but the little indignant fellow was not to be soothed in that way, after such unmerited treatment, and gave his little mistress and her father ample trouble before they finished their ride.

"I cannot think why he behaved in this way," said Mr. Beauvilliers, uneasily, scanning him over with his eyes.

"Papa, I touched him with the whip."

"How came you to do that, my Lotty; do you not know he will not bear it?"

"Yes, papa, I did it on purpose, because—because you know I *must* go to school"—and the little voice faltered.

"I know it, I know it, my child. Well, we will consult your uncles and brothers."

It is needless to say that all the Beauvilliers

were consulted, and the matter ended in its being decided that Lotty should go to a school in Bath.

All the Beauvilliers that had a right from near relationship went to see the school, the governess, Lotty's future playmates, even her private individual bed. All the Beauvilliers that had not this privilege rode into Bath to look at the house outside.

Being a very clever, sensible woman, Miss Elton was rather amused than annoyed at these proceedings, and was a prey to a vast amount of curiosity to see the object of so much affection.

She imparted her feelings to Millicent Erle, her eldest pupil, and besought her kind aid to assist in reconciling, what she supposed would be, a spoilt darling to the trammels of school.

In compassion to the aged and apparently heart-broken father, Miss Elton had agreed that, every Saturday, Lotty was to go to Beaucourt, see her father, and return to school on Monday.

"But how will she travel, sir? Beau-court must be twenty miles from here," said Miss Elton.

"She will ride," replied Mr. Beauvilliers.

"Ride!" exclaimed Miss Elton, "that child!"

"Yes," returned Mr. Beauvilliers, "she is used to it. I will send her pony and servant every Friday evening to the mews close by."

Miss Elton half repented accepting the charge of such a child, especially when hearing the noise of a great cavalcade in the street, she looked out to see what was the matter, and with amazement beheld the equestrians stopping at her door. Accompanied by four brothers and three uncles was Lotty, a little diminutive girl, on a spirited black pony, that did not seem a whit the less wicked, though it had come twenty miles.

Her father had been too much overcome to bring her himself; so, to keep up her spirits, a large concourse of affectionate Beauvilliers

had assembled to escort her on her way. Before reaching Bath, they had thought it prudent and proper to suffer her to go through the town with only a limited number, which was fortunate for Miss Elton. She little knew that about a dozen more Beauvilliers were sorrowfully wending their way home, after taking leave of their girl.

The four brothers and the three uncles were all kindly invited in.

"No, we thank you heartily. If we do, we shall never be able to leave her, so take her out of our sight as soon as may be."

Passionately kissing Norman, her youngest and favourite brother, who had leaped down to take her off her pony, Lotty ran into the house and disappeared from the sight of the loving Beauvilliers.

When they overtook the others, many were the anxious questions, "How she looked?" "What she said?" and "Did she bear the parting well?" They shook their heads

mournfully at every fresh detail, and then they all disputed who was to lead Midge home.

"I, and I only," said Norman, "so catch us if you can."

And with an inspiriting view-halloo, away he went over hill and dale, and led the Beauvilliers such a chase, that they had no time for any dismals, but arrived at Beau-court in such elevated spirits, with so much to tell of the exciting gallop, that Mr. Beauvilliers was quite enlivened thereby.

CHAPTER IX.

Miss Elton had amused herself in picturing to her mind what her new pupil would be like, and this was the ideal she formed.

A ruddy-faced chubby girl of substantial form, and Beauvillian stature, sweet-tempered, or she would not be so loved; somewhat spoilt, or she would not have been spared to school. A trifle hoydenish, or the stress laid upon feminine associates would not have been so urgent.

She saw before her a little fair girl, looking quite a child in her riding gear. As she removed her hat she displayed eyes that amazed

Miss Elton with their size and brilliancy, and before she could recover her astonishment, the little thing gathered up her habit, and passing her fingers through her thick, short curls, she swept them off her forehead, and approaching Miss Elton, said in a low, soft voice—

"Madam, you must try to love me, that you may teach me well, because I wish to return soon to my father."

"I shall be certain to love you," said Miss Elton, irresistibly, as it were.

"I hope you will be certain, madam; how soon do the quickest and cleverest girls leave school?"

"At seventeen, I think," said Miss Elton, who saw at a glance how matter-of-fact her new pupil was.

"I shall try to learn everything you wish me by the time I am sixteen. May I begin now?"

"Yes, dear; but you must change your

dress first. Your boxes came yesterday by the waggon, and everything is ready for you."

"When I am dressed, madam, where shall I find you?"

"I will send Millicent Erle for you."

"Is she one of my school-fellows?"

"Yes."

"Will she be kind to me?"

"She is kind to every one."

"Then, madam, I shall be ready to come down with her in half an hour."

"Will you have no one to help you?"

"Oh, no, madam; papa would be ashamed of his little girl if she could not do everything for herself."

Lotty lifted up her large eyes to Miss Elton's face with a serious, searching look. She seemed satisfied with her scrutiny, and was turning away, when Miss Elton stooped down and kissed her. A smile came over the child's face like a sunbeam.

"Thank you, madam," she said, and retired.

Miss Elton was charmed, and during the half-hour she had to wait for Lotty's re-appearance, was solely occupied in thinking of her.

"What intellect in that broad brow and intelligent eyes! what firmness expressed in the mouth and chin! she will be an extraordinary woman."

Millicent went for her at the time appointed; and when she re-appeared with the new pupil, about whom something wonderful had been promulgated, all eyes were turned upon her. Lotty's little black frock set off her fair skin to great advantage. Her rebellious curls had been vehemently brushed into some order, but were breaking bounds all over her head, threatening to be in wild confusion shortly. Her figure was round and plump, as a child's should be, without being fat; her features were pretty and piquant, while her eyes were glorious. Altogether, Lotty's appearance created a buzz of satisfaction and admiration. She walked straight up to Miss Elton, and in a confiding,

childish way leant her head against her, to the manifest astonishment of sundry girls, who had an awe of Miss Elton profound and deep, according to their various misdemeanours. Miss Elton was surprised at the quickness of her new pupil: Lotty imbibed knowledge like the air she breathed. At five, after working hard, Miss Elton said—

"Now you must go and play, for it is wrong to work without relaxation."

For a moment Lotty looked troubled; then obeying Miss Elton's look, she took Millicent's arm, and left the room with the other girls.

She stood aloof from them all, watching in silent wonder their games, their bickerings, their altercations.

One girl had fallen and cut herself, the others passed heedlessly on. At that moment a swift foot was heard; a lovely, rosy girl sprang forward and raised her with gentle words. "Margaret! Margaret!" was uttered joyfully by every one. "Margaret! dear Margaret!"

"How are you all?" said Margaret; "I am so glad to see you! Look, this is for you, and you," she continued, dispensing packets of sugarplums. "And who are you?" she added, running up to Lotty with such a sweet, glowing face, that she was quite amazed.

"I am Charlotte Beauvilliers."

"And I am Margaret Montagu; and you must take this kiss, because I brought you no packet. I did not know you were here."

"I like the kiss best," said the truthful Lotty; "will you love me?"

"Yes, dearly."

So thus began that famous friendship.

In time, Lotty grew just what her mother meant school should make her—a happy, romping, school-girl, full of life, health, and spirits. Her head and heart were not yet fitted for hard trials; she would have done her duty, but probably sunk under the weight of too much responsibility.

CHAPTER X.

But we have forgotten the bride and bridegroom.

They enjoyed their tour very much. Margaret saw more of the world in that fortnight, than she had done in her whole life, and Harold (who, to tell the truth, was a little bit *blasé*) derived infinite amusement from her unsophisticated happiness and delight. There was something so new, fresh, and original to him in all she did, that he thought he never should be tired of such a companion. To be sure, she was more girlish and simple than he had imagined, but that was all the more delightful, at least, so it seemed at present

In the mean time, a very different scene was acting at Montagu House. Millicent and Lotty had accompanied Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu there after the marriage, to assist them in their preparations for receiving their darling Margaret as Lady Leigh.

During the five years that they had ostensibly lived at Bath, they always came during the holidays, accompanied by such school friends as Margaret selected, to Montagu House. Millicent in particular, and Basil, who was asked to meet her, were frequent guests, even during their grandfather's lifetime. For he was a just man, and however faulty his son-in-law might be, and however odious the wife he had taken to replace his daughter; yet he would not suffer the children to be wholly estranged from their father.

Erlscourt was, however, no place for Millicent; but at Montagu House she could now and then see her father, and occasionally spend a day with him.

Not that it could be any satisfaction to a gentle, intelligent mind like hers, to see how misrule reigned there, to say nothing worse. A tribe of rude, unmannerly children, encouraged by Lady Erlscourt, and unrestrained by their father, subjected the half-brother and sister to many slights and indignities, to which less indulgent and. kind natures would not have submitted.

Both Basil and Millicent tried, in their different ways, to be on more affectionate terms with their father's second family, and spared no means to counteract the evil influence of Lady Erlscourt. And amply rewarded did they feel themselves, if in one or two they found symptoms of a better nature, and they willingly put up with their rudeness in the hope of benefitting them.

Age and ill-doings had not improved either Lord or Lady Erlscourt, since the time that Basil had run away, and by this means released himself and his little sister.

He was more morose, irritable, and unsociable than ever.

She had lost the beauty that had raised her to her present position, and was considerably changed for the worse in every respect. In one thing she remained unaltered; her hatred to her step-children only gained strength with time.

Basil stood in the way of her own son becoming Lord Erlscourt, while Millicent's beauty, grace, and dignified manners, shone conspicuous to the detriment of her own daughters.

Nevertheless, a semblance of interest and affection was carried on, though most warmly kept up on the part of the step-children.

Basil visited his father often, and was at his command on all occasions, for the life Lord Erlscourt led was beginning to tell upon him, and it was often necessary to have such an adviser as Basil at hand. Lady Erlscourt and her numerous low relatives were on the watch to take any advantage they could gain. This

her husband knew; and not so much out of love for his son, as to spite her, he did nothing without that son's advice.

The disinterested, highly-principled conduct of Basil ought to have won him their best affections, that is, if they were worth having. But a nature like hers, could not understand, and a heart like Lord Erlscourt's could not appreciate such conduct.

Millicent saw them twice a year, during the holidays which she was purposely asked to spend at Montagu House. Just before her grandfather's death, she had been engaged to be married to a dear friend of her brother's, Gerald Herbert; but after this death, as was intimated before, their trials began. Millicent's marriage was peremptorily broken off, and she was again sent to school. Not that any objection could be made to the match, or to the object of her affections; but it was simply the old spirit, that had so cruelly crushed her childhood's happiness, again break-

ing forth, on finding her once more in its power.

Basil, after enduring a series of conduct, disgusting from its mean vulgarity, and irritating from its excessive spite, had left the home he had wished to find with his father, and gone abroad.

But to return to Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu. They have arrived at their destination. Old Sir Thomas finds himself better, warmer, more at home in his old velvet-covered chair, in the ancient library, with its blazing wood fire.

Lady Montagu is busy upstairs. She is not looking to see that their own rooms are neat and well aired, and everything as it ought to be: no, she is in the state bed-chamber, and she is already ordering fires to be lit, and the grand old embroidered satin coverlid to be brought out.

In fact, though she does not expect her for a week, she is preparing for the coming of Lady Leigh.

Lotty is at the window, partly thinking how glorious the trees look in their autumn beauty, and partly, whether her school-wife finds Harold as good a husband as she was.

Lotty has grown a little, not much. The Beauvilliers say to each other, "She is very young, we must not expect to see her very tall as yet."

Lotty has never forgotten her mother's words. Though she is such a wild, mad thing at times, with spirits that nothing seems to tame, she finds out what her duty is, and does it.

Millicent is in the conservatory. She hears her name whispered in a broken voice. She looks up.—Can this be Basil?

Weary, travel-stained, and pale as he appeared, that was nothing to the haggard wildness in his eyes, his restless, despairing look.

"Dearest brother!" said Millicent, springing to his side.

"Sister, my sister! the only thing I have left to love!" said Basil in hollow tones.

"Basil, speak not thus, I implore you. What has happened?"

"Ah! Millicent, did you not guess my secret? Could you not have guarded my treasure for me? God help me! for vain is the help of man; or take me to himself, for my burden is too great to bear."

The truth flashed on Millicent's mind.

"Basil, you were wrong not to tell me, to trust me. I conceived nothing of what I too plainly see now—alas! alas! too late!"

"I know it is too late. I hurried home on the receipt of your letter, telling me that the marriage was to take place. I hastened home, not, Milly to serve myself, but that most lovely, innocent, gentle spirit. I know Sir Harold by report only; but oh! Millicent, he is not the husband she should have. Generous and kind-hearted I know he is; but she is such a child, she has such a gentle, timid heart; if he does not find the way to it, if he speaks but an unkind word, he will crush it, wound it, break it.

Ah! Milly, Milly, did you not know that I loved Margaret more than my life? that I only refrained from telling her so, because of her youth and innocence?"

"No, dearest Basil, no, I never guessed it. You have been so much together since she was the little gentle child of seven years old. I traced nothing but the love that had always passed between you. Besides, I was with Isabel at the sea-side the last holidays."

"True, most true," murmured Basil. "To the lone forest only did I whisper my hopes and wishes. During the long silent nights, under the arching boughs, with no spectator but the quiet, gentle moon, did I utter vows to make the happiness of that lovely being my one care and pleasure. Oh! Margaret, Margaret, lost to me! and still more lost am I; thus dreaming, thus speaking, and thou the wife of another."

Shocked to see that strong, nervous frame shaken like a timid child's, still more shocked

at the grief and despair which seemed to have upset that high and noble heart, Millicent could but kiss the fevered brow, and clasp the wringing hands.

"He will not understand her delicate, shrinking nature, apparently timid and weak, but strong in its purposes of love and unselfishness; and she is so young, but a child yet, to be moulded into the intelligent, just-thinking, high-principled woman. I know her, ah! so well. Let a check be given to the efforts her own heart will prompt her to make, and that heart will close, and preying upon itself, will break perhaps, and die, but never open again, to aught save love and confidence."

"Basil, my brother," murmured Millicent, in low, soft tones, "we are not to meet our mother but through much tribulation, I pray God to give you strength to bear this burden. You have much to live for yet. Our house to redeem from perdition, our people and lands

to save from destruction. Think, Basil, for one moment, think what we should be without you."

"Give me time, sister, give me time. But you know me well enough to believe that I will not bear this shame upon my heart and live. Give me but time. I will now go to the keeper's house in the forest; I will take possession of my rooms there; I will bury myself and my grief in the heart of the woods. Pray for me, Millicent; pray that I may leave it there, and return to you, blighted, indeed, but with a firm purpose to do my duty, as becomes a man and a Christian. I think, yes, sister, I half think, if I know that she is happy, I may die content."

He buried his face in his hands, and the strong manly frame shook with emotion.

"Oh, my Basil! may I not come with you? may I not devote myself to you, and you only?"

"No, Milly, no! I must be alone; and I

beseech you, sister, tell no one that you have seen me, or that I have returned to England. You shall hear from me constantly; I shall write, yes, perhaps, daily. But give me time, Milly, give me time, and leave me alone to wrestle with my sorrow."

He folded her in his arms with a hasty but fond embrace, and was gone before she could utter one word to detain him.

It was some time before she could calm herself sufficiently to return to the library. Lotty was still watching the various changes in the lovely landscape, as it lay sloping before the windows, bathed in glowing sunshine; Sir Thomas was dozing, and Lady Montagu reading.

"Come," said Lotty, as Millicent entered, "and watch these rooks; they seem bent upon some extraordinary quaint business."

As Millicent joined her, she continued, in a voice hardly to be heard at the other end of the room, "How is Basil?"

"What do you know about him?" said Milly, in amazement, and evasively.

"I mean, how did he bear it?" said Lotty.

"Bear what? Lotty, you are an enigma."

"No, that I am not; I am straightforward enough. Is poor Basil in great distress?"

"How did you know he was here?"

"I did not know at all, but I had an idea he would come, and I see a man's glove lying on the lawn. Now, it is not Sir Thomas's, gardeners do not generally wear gloves, so I concluded it to be Basil's."

"Lotty, Lotty, you are too quick for me to deceive you. Basil has, indeed, been here, that is, the ghost of Basil. Ah, my Lotty! never did I see such a change."

"Come, do not take on so; I dare say he wished no one to know he is here, so let us go into the dear old forest, then you shall tell me everything, and cry at your leisure—it will do you good."

Milly looked with surprise at the little

school-girl by her side, and, when they were fairly out of the house, said, "Little Lotty, tell me how you know all these things that you seem to know?"

"Nobody told me, but I guessed. I am fifteen, and, Miss Elton says, quite learned enough to leave school next year. However, I love Margaret, and I love Basil; I think he is a man, in the true sense of the word, fit to take upon himself the care of such a creature as Margaret. He is loving, yet manly; gentle, yet firm; good, yet forbearing. I like Basil very much, and if he had married Margaret, I would have been bridesmaid; that is, I think I would, for I do not approve of marrying."

"And why, little one, did you deem it necessary to have any ideas on the subject?"

"Why should I not? Did Flory and Carry think of aught else? to say nothing of Augusta. They believed me to be a safe listener, ignorant and innocent, so I heard all, and drew

my conclusions. If any man marries you, he will do well. If Basil had married Margaret, they would have been happy; now, she will not, without a great deal of sorrow first. If any one marries Flory, he will have a mischief-making, gossiping wife, and that is not good. If anybody marries Carry, he might just as well have some old, fat, child-spoiling nurse for a wife, which is also not good. And if any fool marries Augusta—but is there such a fool in the world? I think not. Lastly, if any one wants to marry me"—here Lotty drew herself up—"he will repent it. So you see, out of all of us, I deem only one fit to be married."

Lotty chatted on thus, to divert her companion's mind.

"You are certainly very quick-witted, my Lotty," said Millicent.

"About men, I am," said Lotty; "because I live with them so much. But all my brothers, and uncles, and cousins are true Beau-

villians—they all make good husbands; and I wish, Milly, you would think of marrying Norman, instead of Gerald."

"Lotty!"

"Well, do not look so indignant! There, now, that has done you good, getting in a rage; no, rage I cannot call it, but getting put out with me. Now, come, pray tell me, how is Basil?"

"Heart-broken, Lotty."

"Not quite, I hope. Where has he hid himself? I suppose at the old keeper's cottage."

"Lotty, you are a little witch."

"No, only sharp. But could you not imagine to yourself that, buried in the heart of the forest, with nothing but the grand old boles of the trees, and the beautiful, spiritual tracery of the branches all around you, with a pale star gleaming here and there, like the pitying eye of an angel, you could there lay your sorrowful heart before the Almighty, and

be sure that the pitying eyes would bear the bruised thing to heaven."

"My Lotty! how unlike the wild Lotty you talk."

"But why should I not feel, especially for those I love? Basil will talk to his beloved forest, he will pour out his griefs in her lonely, dark bosom, and return to us with the light and the sun; but he will never love any one but Margaret. And now, see the rooks are wheeling about, preparatory to a flight to their dormitories; we must fly home, too, or we shall lose our dinners. You must not fret; you cannot unmarry Margaret. I never approved of the marriage, mind; let Basil surfeit himself with grief, he will then begin to think of the dearest of sisters, and be comforted."

"But, Lotty, you surprise me so; but now you were the little, wild school-girl, coming to me for advice on every occasion: our positions seem to me reversed."

"That is because your kind heart is so grieved and disturbed for Basil; your usual judgment and sense are clouded. Now, I, caring for nothing and nobody, think calmly and with reason."

"Caring for nothing and nobody, Lotty?"

"Yes, since I have lost Margaret. But, however, do not fear that our reversed positions will be permanent; take your place again, be the loved, honoured, adored Millicent, and I will be once more Charlotte Beauvilliers."

CHAPTER XI.

MARGARET passed her father's threshold like a sunbeam. Surely they had forgotten, even in that short time, that she was so lovely, fresh, and blooming; or were her natural perfections doubled, as she stood by the side of her handsome, distinguished-looking husband, blushing and smiling under the glance of his beaming eyes? To herself she seemed doubled; another heart was hers, another life and existence bound with her life. Twofold were her sources of pleasure and happiness; she had yet to realize that twofold might be her sorrows.

The partial dotage into which Sir Thomas

had fallen, through grief at the loss of his daughter, and fear lest they had not done wisely by their Margaret, gave way before the delight of her presence, the sunny halo she diffused around her. Each night he confided to the equally-pleased mother, "I think we did right to let our Margaret marry;" and each night she answered in return, "God bless her sweet beaming face, may we die ere we see it changed!"

Little Lotty was very unpleasant all this time, and so far from suffering Margaret to hold her former place in her time and affections, was continually to be seen in a biting, sarcastic, acrimonious mood, which had, among her school-fellows, gained her the name of "Bear."

At a certain hour, every day, she would mount her pony, and, in sulky silence, start off alone for the forest; and though some secret signs might pass between her and Millicent, the Beauvillian blood was not in a mood to

submit to any questioning. That she rode some distance, and at a good pace, might be judged from the state of her steed when she returned, but nothing more definite could be obtained of her doings.

"Indeed, Lotty," said Margaret, one day, "I think you are very unkind to me; your holidays are nearly over, and, perhaps, when you are again at liberty, I may not be here."

"You will not miss me, I dare say; you have Harold," returned Lotty.

"But I shall miss you, my little school-husband; and do you imagine, because I am married, that every other feeling is absorbed? unkind little bear!"

"When every other word you say is 'Harold,' I do not know how Lotty is to be considered."

"You know my first duty is to him, and all my first wishes should be: nevertheless, there is no reason why we are to love each other less."

"I did not approve of the marriage from the first," retorted Lotty; "it is so absurd of girls to go and marry when they do not quite know their own minds, and at all events, have not lost all their girlisms, and become reasonable women."

"I do not know that you ever found me unreasonable, Lotty."

"No; I should be very glad for you if I thought you were likely to become unreasonable now and then, for I am sure it would do Harold good."

"How?" said the loyal young wife, her cheek flushing.

"Because he has been accustomed to have everything so much his own way, that he will become a victim to *ennui*, unless you give him a little trouble. If he had been wise enough to marry Augusta, he would have been in hot water all his life, and all the better for it."

Tears filled the soft eyes, so lately Lotty's pride and delight.

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret! don't cry! how can you care for what your wild Lotty says?"

"But I do care, how can I help it? I know you only say what you feel."

"Then, my Queen Margaret, remember what I say: it is not good to let a man see how much you love him, or how great his power is over you. If he has a mean mind, he will take advantage thereof; if he has a generous, kind heart like Harold's, he will not think the better of you for always deferring to his opinion, he will forget to 'give and take,' 'bear and forbear.' Do not let him think that you are a love-sick school-girl. Husbands now-a-days, and all days, I imagine, want some other qualities in their wives beside love, Margaret."

"I doubt I am nothing better, Lotty. I feel great purposes within me, but they are all love, and nothing else."

"Then all I can say is, Harold is very

happy to have such love, and I hope it will do you both a great deal of good."

"I must say, I have been highly edified with this lecture on matrimony," said Millicent, coming forward; "and really wonder, do not you, Margaret, where little Lotty picks up her experience?"

Lotty pouted.

"I shall be curious to see how she conducts herself when a wife, shall not you, Margaret?" continued Milly.

"I think she will be the best little wife in the world," said Margaret, her kind heart feeling for Lotty's discomposure.

"Have you the letter ready?" said the little Bear to Millicent, "for it is time I should go."

"Where do you go, Lotty?" said Margaret.

"She is a messenger for me, dear Meg," said Milly; "but I shall not send to-day, Lotty, dear, that you may be as much with Margaret as possible." As she spoke, a car-

riage, evidently from Erlscourt, drove furiously up to the door. With the certainty that it could only be the bearer of some bad tidings, Millicent and her companions hastily left the room to learn the reason.

Lord Erlscourt had met with some sad accident, such as precluded, so Basil's hasty letter said, any hopes of a favourable recovery. In fact, if she wished to see her father again, she must return to Erlscourt in the carriage sent for her.

It needed no further persuasion to decide Millicent; in a few minutes she was ready. Lotty obtained permission to accompany her; it was well she had that faithful little comforter, for the scene at Erlscourt was much more trying and painful than any imagination of hers could picture. The ungodly, dying father, the selfish, upbraiding wife, the unruly, riotous children, all formed a scene so painful and disgusting, that nothing but the firm determination to do their duty, supported the brother and sister.

Basil besought Millicent to make no inquiries concerning the cause of the accident; while she, in tenderness to him, refrained from thinking of aught else than assisting him.

The surgeons had announced their inability to hold out any hopes of life, while the battered, bruised appearance of their patient, his squalid, soiled clothes, and bloated, sullen visage, too plainly showed that a drunken broil with people much beneath him, had given a rascal's death and felon's end to a peer of the realm. And yet this was not so sad to see, as the rude, grasping determination with which his wife and her relatives crowded round the dying bed, with indecorous haste and greediness, to get words, if not deeds, executed in their favour. In vain Millicent, seated by her father's pillow, appalled by the fierce oaths and imprecations that fell from lips that ought to have been praying, besought them to leave him in peace. The words and threats they dare not bestow on him, were

showered on herself. Basil, seated on the other side bathing his father's hot temples, said nothing; he knew that to speak would be to raise the storm still higher. The dying father looked at his eldest son and daughter, the pitying eyes of each were fixed on him with unmistakable love and devotion; their fair hair, so silky and wavy, so like their mother's, gave them the appearance of angels amid the group of dark, lowering faces. He feebly waved his hand to enforce silence, and in a distinct, clear voice, said—

"I leave everything of which I die possessed to my son Basil."

The head drooped, the jaw fell—Lord Erlscourt was dead.

CHAPTER XII.

SOME months passed away.

Sir Harold and Lady Leigh had departed for Court Leigh, leaving the kind and loving old parents happy in the society of a daughter-in-law and two fine grandchildren, and still more happy in the prospect of seeing their Margaret again at Christmas.

Lotty was once more at school; she had neither eyes nor ears for anything but good hard study. Miss Elton half repented the concession she had made, that she should leave school at sixteen; one more year there, and Lotty would have all the learning Miss Elton

was capable of imparting, at her fingers' ends. Already she was much above every girl in the school. No study tired her, no intricacies puzzled her. But Lotty had ceased to be the merry school-girl; Augusta had left school, and it was reported she was going to be married to a rich London banker, an M.P.: but time went on, still neither cake nor wedding favours arrived.

Carry and Flory are both to leave school next half, being two very pretty, ignorant, conceited, happy, school-girls. Millicent is with her brother deep in the forest, dwelling together in the old Forest House. But she is happy; sometimes alone with Basil, sometimes accompanied in her walks and rides by a fitting mate for such beauty and gentleness as hers.

She is to be married in the spring; that was Basil's first act and deed, as was fitting it should be. And Basil himself?

In those dark-blue eyes there is a shadow, the beautiful head with its clustering curls of

fair hair droops, the fine athletic frame falters, but only when alone.

As his father died with those words upon his lips that left Basil heir to everything, there also fell a conviction upon his mind that he was responsible for everything.

Assuming at once the position he meant to keep, which, spite his youth and inexperience, all could see he would keep, Basil dismissed peremptorily, for ever, the rude and riotous companions his father had so unfortunately encouraged: leaving all unnoticed the gibes and sneers that followed all his actions, the taunts that were showered on him, because his father's funeral was performed with the utmost privacy and quietness. It needed but little time to show, that the young Lord Erlscourt knew what he ought to do, and did it. Perhaps the hardest duty he had to perform was with Lady Erlscourt. But she, in her turn, discovered that vituperative threats, beseechings, and entreaties, were alike unavailing

with the present head of the house. Besides, her best policy was to be friends, for otherwise she and her children were beggars. The old lord, wicked as he had been, knew the value of a character like Basil's, and felt that he left his wife and second family in the safest hands, when he left them in his son's.

As soon as Basil found that Lady Erlscourt could be reasonable, he, with the delicacy of a good and great mind, opened his plans to her, as if for consultation between them. And she found that although she had only the semblance of a choice, yet she could not but feel that she little deserved the good fortune her step-son was preparing for her.

It was absolutely necessary for the well-being of the estate that Erlscourt should be cleared of its late inhabitants. Basil felt that no efforts of his could remove the base influence of the late reign, so long as ever one of the old domestics was allowed to remain.

Lady Erlscourt would have remonstrated,

had she dared, on Basil's determination to shut the castle up for a term of years; but he allowed her so handsome a sum to hire a house in London, Bath, or any other town, that she could say nothing; further sums were given her, but all at Basil's free command, upon her fulfilling certain conditions regarding her children. The two eldest girls were to be sent to school; he undertook the expense of educating the boys himself; this arrangement would leave her a little girl to be a companion at home.

In everything to secure the respectability of his half brothers and sisters, Basil acted with the wisdom of an older head, and the generosity of a noble mind.

He fitted up the old Forest House, and having cared for them all, and established them all as he wished, he waited but the end of their mourning to make the patient Millicent happy, happy in the love and confidence of a

heart most worthy of her: to give her such happiness as was never to be his.

True, he had many duties before him, and he would taste the rare happiness of doing good, and reaping the fruits thereof. He had the hard, and yet most pleasing duty of improving his estates, reforming his tenantry, repairing the rack and ruin of the last reign, and was young enough to feel assured that, in all probability, he would see the benefits of his labours. Was there no pleasure in these prospects, in these hopes? There was.

Basil again said to himself,

"If I only know that the gentle angel who so early crossed my path of life is happy, I shall live content."

CHAPTER XIII.

COURT LEIGH was a very fine old place: quaint and curious were its angles, courts, and turrets, with casement windows of all sizes and shapes, scarcely two alike. Myrtle trees crept up to the higher windows, cut and trimmed with such old-fashioned precision, that the eyes lingered lovingly on a wild creeping rose, which sent its thousand clusters of scented blossoms in every direction. Down by the lower windows, it grew with the grave decorum that seemed to pervade the place; but up out of reach, it threw its graceful branches in wild confusion over the staid

myrtles, peeping out here and there, when least expected, every bright blossom laughing, as in sport, that no pruning knife could reach them.

The stately pleasaunce of olden time was not wanting, leading to an avenue of walnut trees; this was again crossed by one of elms, and farther in the distance was a double avenue of gnarled old oaks; magnificent trees, many centuries old, leading the imagination to wonder if they ever could have been young, tender saplings, so old, so grey, so venerable did they appear.

Near the house was a stately parterre of flowers, with clipped yew trees at regular distances, and little summer-houses at each corner.

Not a dead leaf to be seen, not a twig displaced, not a branch out of order. Lovely as the old house looked in the evening sunset, yet said Margaret to herself, "What a formal old garden!"

Lady Katherine Leigh, with the gentle and quiet Pru. and Pro., were there to greet the newly-married pair, and while the bride felt that nothing could be meant more kindly, the formality of her reception matched the garden.

Between a small lane of servants, Lady Katherine advanced, and restraining, by her solemn manner, Margaret's gentle impulse of affection, made a sort of oration over her, which visibly affected Pru. and Pro. and some of the stately maidens, while Harold inwardly chafed, and suppressed tittering might have been heard from among the younger servants. She was about to perform the same ceremony over her son; but taking his mother's arm in his, he led her into the drawing-room before she had time to say a word.

"My son, my dear son! on such an occasion, it was proper I should say a few words."

"Dearest mother, I am so fatigued," said Harold, throwing himself listlessly on the sofa.

"A few words, my dear son, were expected of me; I had prepared them."

"I kiss your hands, dear mother, and ask for permission to have some soda water."

Lady Katherine was not to be put down in this way; Harold had his soda water, shared half with his dear Meg, drew her on to the sofa by his side, and then felt he might listen patiently.

So he had it all two or three times over, with the action intended for each point; and while he might weary at his mother's prolixity, he felt thankful this scene, copied from some act of the blessed Queen Charlotte's, was enacted before so small an audience. Three out of the four certainly listening with devout and reverent attention, not to say admiration.

Lady Katherine was a very kind-hearted, good, woman, but not by any means a sensible one.

Let an idea once gain entrance into her brain, it remained there stereotyped; no ac-

cidental circumstance, no change of events, altered that idea; it became fixed in her mind n the original state in which it entered. She had married late in life herself, indeed she was nearly forty before that event took place, consequently she had not undergone the ordeal of a new life, or a new change of ideas, when the mind was young and plastic; she had therefore no idea of change—variety was inconceivable. Whether her opinions and habits agreed with old Sir Harold Leigh's, might have been questioned had they lived long together; but having ample reason to be satisfied with the discretion and care with which she ruled his house, the stateliness with which she presided at the head of his table, and the excellence of her *cuisine;* he managed to live very happily for eight years with a woman who was certainly intended by education, if not by nature, for an old maid, rather than a wife and mother.

On becoming a widow, Lady Katherine

assumed an extra portion of reserve and state. Everything was conducted after the manner of a small court; whereof Lady Katherine was Queen, the pretty little erect ladies, Georgina and Charlotte, were princesses, and a rosy, curly-pated, baby boy, the heir apparent.

Under this stiff, but kind rule, formal but gentle sway, no wonder Georgina and Charlotte changed into Prudence and Propriety.

Harold of course went to school, from school to college, from college into the army, ever bearing a deferential and dutiful feeling towards his mother, while each change of scene and place the more unfitted him for the sombre pleasures of his home.

It never entered Lady Katherine's head that a young man ought to have something to do; she could not expect the fine, handsome, lively boy to sit down, knit or knot, play quadrille or cribbage, evening after evening, from week to week, year to year, as the dutiful and patient Georgina and Charlotte did. But still

she could not suffer such an act as that he should go shooting with keepers, hunting with farmers, fishing with strangers. She suffered prodigious anxieties, trying to think of some employment for him, having some faint remembrances of idle hands and Satan's mischief, which tormented her, without her being able to discover why it did so. She ransacked the old library for proper, and at the same time reasonably entertaining, books for him; she even learned backgammon to please him; though Pru. and Pro. were sent to the other end of the room when they played, that their innocent minds might not even know the look of dice. Nevertheless Harold's holidays always cost her a fit of illness, and the termination of them was generally highly agreeable to all parties, though they loved each other warmly.

As Harold grew older, he would have liked to employ the many hours he spent over idle stories, novels, or travels, or that he lounged away with his dogs, or slept, or ate away, in

riding over his estates, and becoming acquainted with his tenantry.

But that was quite forbidden, was considered about the last thing he ought to do; in fact, everything regarding business, all the duties and obligations of landlord and tenant, were carefully kept from him, not from any other feeling than that Lady Katherine had been taught to consider there was an insuperable bar between the rich and the poor.

They had an agent or steward—he was the proper person to manage such things; but for Sir Harold to know that he had tenants who had wants, or for them to know that they had a landlord who would himself attend to such wants, was deemed by Lady Katherine a thing unknown, unheard of.

So from his childhood, Harold had many idle, weary, listless days, wherein he had nothing to do, nothing in which to be interested.

This had imparted to his character a sort of indolent independence of any thing not pe-

culiarly interesting; torpor of mind would accompany torpor of body; and though on occasion he could readily throw off both, and appear the frank, generous, intelligent fellow he really was, yet he as readily gave way to the *dolce far niente*, and was at the time of his marriage as useless and uninteresting a member of society, as a rich young baronet could be allowed to be.

Nevertheless he was the cynosure of the loveliest, softest eyes, the loadstone of the warmest, gentlest heart this erring world can give.

Though no one was present save themselves, Lady Katherine had deemed it proper to have a grand banquet prepared; all the rich old family plate, all the rare old china, and drapery marvellous for age, beauty, and fineness of texture, were displayed.

But Margaret was thinking so much of Harold, so far from her at the bottom of the great table, yawning and looking vexed, that

she noticed but little of all this grandeur. They went through the long stately dinner in a dignified manner certainly; Lady Katherine prosed to her heart's content; Pru. and Pro. feebly chirped, now and then, little staid sentences; Harold was almost silent, and Margaret was fast catching the chirping tone, in her efforts to comport herself to Lady Katherine's satisfaction.

When at last the weary dinner was over, and the servants were withdrawn, Harold jumped up with some degree of energy, and protesting he would be banished no longer, seated himself in the old-fashioned window, where Margaret with joyful alacrity joined him. She looked very much inclined to seat herself upon a loved knee, that looked an invitation most indisputably; but awe of Lady Katherine prevented that indecorum; still one little white hand did nestle coaxingly in the luxuriant hair, so dark, so rich.

"My dear," said Lady Katherine, "pray

do not; remember there are young people in the room; I cannot permit Georgiana and Charlotte to witness such—"

"Dear mother, may not my wife pull about my locks?" said Harold.

"Certainly not, I never heard of such a thing; should any servant have occasion to enter, pray, my dear son, what would they think?"

"Servants have no business to think, mother," said Harold yawning.

"Shall we go out, Harold?" whispered Margaret.

"Yes, by Jove we will! any place is better than this banquet-scented room."

"Pray, my dear son and daughter, be seated. I have much to say to you, Harold; as a mother, it is my duty to give you some advice on your conduct as a married man, and the head of your family."

Harold sat down without a word certainly, but with an expression in his face Margaret had never seen before.

Lady Katherine recapitulated her speech before dinner, with sundry other remarks, which altogether drew the discourse into such a length, that Harold was convicted of a snore in one of the most interesting parts. Apologising in sincerity for his rudeness, Harold declared he must go out, for the journey and the length of the dinner had fatigued him in a great degree. He disappeared in such a hurry that Margaret had not even time to obtain a glance. She was too timid to dare to think of accompanying him, so she followed the stately and rather offended old lady into the great drawing-room, with an air as meek and obedient as her two daughters.

There they sat for two long hours, doing nothing but listen to the old lady's numerous and rather confused stories of her court life; —while Margaret heard the step she loved best in the world, pacing up and down before the windows, smelt the faintest scent of a cigar, and heard the low humming of a voice, that was music to her.

Yet she felt it very wrong and treacherous of her to feel tired, weary, and forlorn, and not even the admiring glances and timid whispers of affection from her new sisters, could make up for the hearing that measured tread. With tea, came the truant, much refreshed, and very eloquent in his praise of the beauty of the night.

Then remarking the pale looks of his wife, he recommended her to go to bed, whither the kind Pru. conducted her, and the more active Pro. ran on before, to see all was as it should be.

In the warm, simple affection they gave her, Margaret did not take further notice of their childish pleasure and girlish questions, than to imagine that they were adapting their manners to her school-girl habits; and she loved them all the more for their goodness to her.

Lady Katherine had sense enough to know, and good-nature enough to declare, that she and the young Lady Leigh must not reign

together. She only intended to remain with them a short time, to give them the advantage of her wisdom and counsels, to start on their matrimonial career with dignity and propriety.

A house within the park had been prepared for her and her daughters, so near, that at any time her valuable advice could be had for the asking: so Margaret, with the sweet earnestness natural to her, and the modest appreciation of her own merits, set herself seriously to work, to imbibe as much courtly wisdom as she could: thinking, in the innocence of her girlish heart, that she was making herself more fit to be the wife of Harold. He was not at first aware that a curb was placed upon the happy flow of spirits, so delightful in his eyes, but rather imputed the change from her girlish gaiety, to embarrassment and fatigue consequent on her new position. So no wonder Court Leigh seemed to him still, the dullest, most weary place in the world.

"I should like," said Margaret one day, as

they paced slowly among the formal old flower beds, "to make a really pretty garden here. These beds look very stiff from the windows, and there are no flowers, either sweet or new, in them."

"I think, little wife, that is a very good notion; the country is such a bore, and this such a dull old hole, I shall be glad of something to do."

"Oh! Harold, do not call our home dull!"

"But it is, Margaret; I have nothing to do here."

Margaret was too young and ignorant to know why or wherefore this was the fact, but said,

"You shall make the plan of a garden, and so will I, and our sisters shall judge between us."

"Make a garden, dear Margaret," said Pru.

"You and Harold make a garden," echoed Pro.

"No, not ourselves, but draw the plan of one," said Margaret.

"Oh! draw a plan," said Pru.

"Of a garden," said Pro.

"Yes, quite right, and you shall judge which is best, my plan or Harold's."

"But we do not understand plans, dear Margaret," said Pru.

"No, we never studied plans, dear Margaret," said Pro.

They had peculiar drawling, but still sweet voices; and as they echoed each other, Margaret could hardly resist laughing, while Harold said in mimic tones, "I hope you will teach them plans, dear Margaret."

The two gentle sisters blushed at their brother's mockery, but a horseman appeared on the lawn, which prevented further converse on their part; for, like well-bred, obedient girls, they fluttered away through the open window, to place themselves under the care and surveillance of their mother, although Harold exclaimed,

"It is Philip!"

Philip was a man, though a cousin, and a young man too, that is about their own age, very handsome also: so, though a near relative, they did not appear again but in the company of their stately mother.

Margaret had time to notice the new arrival, and to learn his relationship to her ere he dismounted. Save her own Harold, and perhaps Basil Erle, he was the handsomest man she had ever seen.

CHAPTER XIV.

PHILIP LEIGH was Harold's first cousin; he had a small estate and a beautiful house, called High Leigh, in the very centre of Harold's property. He was some years older than Harold, and as his uncle, the last baronet, had married very late in life, for some time Philip had been considered heir-presumptive. Even after his uncle's marriage with Lady Katherine, two little girls were born succeeding each other quickly, but for five years no other children followed. It was therefore most natural, that Philip's father and mother should look upon their son as the

future baronet, and bring him up accordingly.

Philip was beginning fully to appreciate the idea of being Sir Philip, and to speculate upon Court Leigh being so much more desirable to live in than High Leigh, when Harold unexpectedly made his appearance, nearly six years after his youngest sister, and not above four months before his father's death.

Philip never forgave Harold this disappointment.

Though handsome, clever, witty, sensible, and moderately rich, Philip lived in the world honoured and esteemed, yet nourishing in his heart a foolish, mean feeling of envy, which only wanted a little encouragement to break out into malice.

Sufficiently talented to succeed in whatsoever he undertook; handsome enough to gain admiration wherever he went; moderate in regard to luxury and wealth, so as to feel perfectly satisfied with the fortune he possessed, yet

Philip counted none of these things of any value or pleasure to him, simply because he was not Sir Philip.

It was strange that so childish and foolish a notion should have taken such deep root in a naturally strong and vigorous intellect. But so it was: every one is supposed to be weak on one subject, and that was his, little as any of his intimate friends or admirers thought so. He was unmarried, not through want of any opportunities of being so; for his handsome mouth would curl with rather supercilious pride, when questioned on the subject, and he was wont to turn such conversation from the point with a half laugh of scorn, that his hearers granted Philip Leigh might use with impunity.

There was not a young lady in his county who would not have been proud to call Philip Leigh husband, and he knew it, from poor little Pru. and Pro., upwards and downwards. No, he dwelt alone; there he could brood over

his one disappointment, and rate and rail away in solitude at a freak of fortune, neither he nor any other man living could remedy. It may be imagined, therefore, he came with no very friendly feelings to greet Harold's wife; that Harold who became Sir Harold at four months old, and who grew and throve in a manner surpassing most babies, and was therefore the more to be disliked and envied.

Who caught measles, hooping cough, and scarlet fever with wonderful celerity, and threw them all off as quickly as he caught them.

Who never got a bad fall, though riding by stealth, for fear of his stately mother, all the most vicious and unbroken horses in the neighbourhood.

Who never was shot, or shot any one, or accidentally blew out his own brains, though for the above-mentioned reason, he took every available opportunity, whether safe or unsafe, of acquiring knowledge in the art of gunnery.

He grew up unscathed, unharmed, as fine,

strong, and healthy a specimen of her Majesty's subjects as might be seen in her dominions; and here he was with a wife, who would most likely put an effectual stop to Philip's secret ambition.

His quick, handsome eyes looked thoughtfully on Lady Leigh, as she blushingly welcomed her Harold's kinsman. "Very pretty, but young and foolish," he mentally said to himself.

As he rode home after half an hour's visit, he mused within himself, and thought thus:

"Lady Leigh is very lovely, but she has married by six years too soon; she is nothing but a school-girl still: if I mistake not, Harold will want something more than a merely pretty wife, to bind him to a home he has never loved. If in her present pliable girlhood she takes pattern by Lady Katherine, they will not be happy long. Harold must have excitement of some sort, or he will be annoyed to an intolerable degree. Humph! I think Lady

Leigh has not wit to see that she should strike out a line of her own, and not copy Lady Katherine. I think she already begins to speak like Pru. and Pro., and Harold will never stand such peaking and puling. However, far be it from me to interfere: if he would marry a school-girl, who ought still to be in her pinbefore instead of wedding gear, it is no business of mine. Yet there is a look in her eyes, a wonderful look,—I suppose it is love,—pure, deep earnest love, such a love as lives but once in the human heart, and leaves it but with death. Will such a love conquer the monotony and every-day trials of married life? Will it prove of sufficient depth, fervour, and strength, to bind Harold to an existence, place, and people, he has hitherto always disliked and fled from? In an older heart it might, perhaps; but I do not think under that simple girlish manner such devotion will be deemed to dwell. I wonder how I should feel with a wife's eyes looking at me as hers did at Ha-

rold? I fancy I should like it; I have now nothing left me but to marry. But whom? Not a single woman that I know could I tolerate for a month, not even Harold's pretty bride, with her fathomless love eyes.

"I have lost the excitement of wondering if Harold would marry; now my fate is decided; I feel that unless I get up some irritation, some object about which to interest myself, I shall sink into the hereditary malady of the Leighs, and become a hypochondriac. Marriage is hateful to me—every woman to be had for the asking; so that unless I may act Bluebeard, and marry a new wife when I am tired of the old one—'I'll none on't.' I think I will amuse myself, by making mischief between Harold and his wife. I'll not go too far, but just see if my judgment is at fault concerning their future career. If he would marry a raw, innocent school-girl, it is surely no fault of mine."

CHAPTER XV.

So Philip became a constant visitor at Court Leigh, and was quite aware that he was a most welcome guest. His easy, quiet flow of amusing conversation, his pertinent and sensible remarks, were each in their turn admired by the whole household.

"Philip puts me much in mind of his gracious Majesty," said Lady Katherine, who meant George the Third, and had not been able to realize the existence of any other sovereign; "his remarks are so sensible, without being verbose."

"My cousin Philip is very sensible," chirped Pru.

"I think our cousin Philip is sensible," echoed Pro.

"Philip is a good-hearted, downright amusing fellow," said Harold.

"I am always so glad to see Philip," said the softest, sweetest voice possible, "he amuses Harold so much."

Philip knew as well as Harold, that great discontent and much distress reigned throughout the whole estate of Court Leigh.

The old Sir Harold had never interested himself about it; and more from ignorance than unkindness, Lady Katherine had declined interfering between the tenantry and the steward; and, as we have seen, brought up Harold in the same ignorance.

The little that he did know, only made him take refuge in the old proverb, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." With his natural predisposition to indolence, fostered by education, he had imbibed a sort of horror of every sort of business; therefore everything

was left in the hands of his steward, who, while doing the best he could, was obliged to sacrifice some person at times to meet exigencies; as that never could be the heir, of course all grievances fell on the tenants. Dilapidated buildings, tumble-down cottages, gateless fields, broken-down hedges, marked the property of Court Leigh in every direction. But Harold was not induced by the sight to put them to rights, for he did not even know they were his; also he might, had he not been too indolent to notice it, have been struck with the difference between his cousin's small estate and his own. Philip had not a bad heart, but he had suffered the little speck of envy to spread and corrode it; also, he was not religious; like many men of vigorous intellect and strong mental powers, he was apt to make those powers his God. Save that he was not Sir Philip, the head of the family, what was there that he was not? In his own eyes none were equal to Philip Leigh, with

none could he compare himself. Yet this one black spot of envy was making him a mean man, and leading him on to do things for which he would be condemned and despised by every right-minded, honourable man.

A little encouragement about this time, from one esteemed as he was, would have made Harold exert himself; and, once he began to interest himself in his affairs, it was not difficult to imagine he might become an efficient country gentleman.

But Philip took a contrary course.

For want of some better amusement, Harold, with no love for it, was apt to linger over the wine, more to escape his mother's prosy court stories and lectures than anything else: Philip encouraged him in this. In their many conversations and mutual confidences, the warm-hearted, frank Harold would dilate upon the simple beauty of his wife's character. Philip chimed in with a sort of compassionate, supercilious air, that gave one the notion they

were talking of some young and timid pet, and left on Harold's mind the impression that his wife was a mere child. And although Philip hated himself for this meanness, he was yet so led away by his master-passion, that he kept on in the same course.

"Oh, Lady Leigh!" said he, one day, "I am delighted to find you alone. In general you are so surrounded with delighted admirers, that I am unable to get in a word."

"Yes," said Margaret, simply, "my sisters are very kind to be so fond of me; we get on so happily together."

"Then you must not be surprised if I envy them," said Philip; "I, who delight so much in the society of superior female minds, and have so seldom enjoyed it."

"Did you not, then, know Lady Katherine before?" said Margaret.

"Is she laughing at me, or a fool?" thought Philip. Then, aloud, "Oh, yes! But do you compare yourself to Lady Katherine?"

"No, not at all," said Margaret, laughing. "I, a simple school-girl, oh, no!"

"But the loveliest of her sex," said Philip, with hypocritical fervour; saying to himself, "She is so simple, she will swallow anything."

"So Harold says," said Margaret, quite composedly, but with such *naïveté*, Philip could see she cared not one straw for her beauty, save as Harold prized it.

"Would that I had been so fortunate as to see you before Harold did," he continued, in a low voice.

"Ah, yes!" said Margaret; "for then you would have told me of him, and I should have learned to love him ere I saw him."

Philip bit his lip, the corners of his haughty mouth curled with disdain, as Margaret continued—

"For I was very much afraid of him at first, and would neither speak to him or look at him, which was very foolish, was it not, Philip?"

"Yes; but, pray tell me, do you love no one but Harold?"

"Oh, yes! What is this world to me but love! I have experienced no other feeling. I know not unkindness, or ever heard a harsh word; love surrounds me, and I can but give love in return."

"Will you give it me?"

"Oh, yes, dear Philip!" said Margaret, holding out both her hands and taking his, her lovely face beaming with affection and brightness. "How can I help loving you, Harold's own cousin?"

Foiled again, Philip Leigh! What sort of character is she—can she be? for such an one had never crossed his path before. Was she really so very innocent, so simple, so guileless? Did she really love Harold with such strange earnestness and devotion, that she could see nothing but through him?

She was a woman after all—nothing but a tender, loving woman. There must be some soft spot in that gentle heart to which he, in his world-wise wisdom and pride of intellect,

could surely find his way. He had never been foiled by woman yet; and that a school-girl should puzzle him, was not to be endured. The Leigh lethargy disappeared under this new excitement: we will leave him to pursue his way.

CHAPTER XVI.

Basil and Millicent were quietly living in their forest-home; he, schooling his heart to perform its allotted duties, through the long life that seemed his probable fate. The gayer, fairer, more delectable path being closed before him, he turned into the rugged, rough road of duty, and already, in the distance, discerned gems of beauty and brilliance opening their rays towards him, as if from heaven.

Millicent was preparing for her marriage, and studying, among the wild forest children, to learn the duties of a clergyman's wife.

Gerald Herbert had been for some years in

holy orders, but as yet having no living, he acted as curate in large, densely-populated, neglected towns.

Conscientious, zealous, and indefatigable, he was one of the most promising specimens of the young clergymen who now, in these happy days, begin to abound in this still more happy land.

His beaming eyes, his energetic countenance, and firm, strong character, would have marked him in earlier ages as a willing and enthusiastic martyr. But, in these times, they give birth to the surmise, that, in the flush and excitement of youthful energy, he might, perhaps, be led into extremes, which his matured judgment would deprecate.

The marriage was to be very private, because the year of mourning for her father had not yet expired; still Basil intended the ceremony to take place at Erlscourt; wishing to prove, if his earnest endeavours, his high principles, had conquered in the task he had given them to do.

Sir Harold and Lady Leigh were among the first guests invited; and while Margaret was glowing with delight at seeing them all again, Basil was nerving himself to receive in pure and noble courtesy in heart as in conduct, that woman as a guest whom he had hoped to welcome as his wife.

But Margaret had two other reasons, besides her dear Milly's promised happiness, for looking forward to this meeting with feelings only to be described as ecstatic.

Her Harold, so like her Harold, had desired her to present, as a wedding-gift to the bridegroom elect, the living of Holmleigh. It was worth five hundred pounds a-year, with a very pretty rectory-house, and, above all, was only a mile from Court Leigh. Thus Margaret and Millicent might look forward to spending their closing years together, as they had done their opening ones.

The other news could only be whispered; and it was whispered in the sweet twilight, as

they sat together the first evening that they met. Had there been light enough, Milly would have wondered at Margaret's beauty, with the rosy bloom blushing bright, and the dark, soft eyes glancing with a pure radiance as she uttered her secret.

"I am to have a little Harold in the summer; you will be near me, Milly, and will see that he is his father's image." Milly showed by her delight the due importance she attached to this secret.

It may be deemed strange that Millicent did not urge Basil to seek any other guests save his present ones; but she judged of his heart by her own, and knew that he would not be calm and free from vain and foolish regrets, until he had thoroughly rooted from his heart any love for the wife of another, than what ought to find place there.

The wound might smart under this mode of treatment, but its cure would be all the more effectual the more it was cauterized; and to see

her, be with her, her husband by her side, her love for another before him, would, she thought, be the last thing necessary.

She appeared before him more lovely than ever, more gentle and engaging than his former fondest expectations had deemed possible: but the pure halo of a wife's love surrounded her. He enshrined her in his heart as an angel, and vowing her a brother's love, with warm courtesy and generous hospitality, he set himself the task of welcoming Sir Harold and Lady Leigh to Erlscourt, as honoured and beloved guests.

"How came it, Queen Margaret," said Sir Harold, "that you never told me of Erlscourt and Erlscourt's lord?" Harold had adopted Lotty's term of endearment and devotion for Margaret, and she well became the title; there was something so stately in her sweet simplicity, so queen-like in her modest air. This Harold said one night in conjugal conference.

"This is my first visit to Erlscourt," said Margaret, nestling in her accustomed place.

"But Erlscourt is nothing without Basil, as you call him. How came you to be so intimate, sweet Meg?"

His "sweet Meg" told him the whole story from beginning to end, winding up by saying,

"You know, Harold, there is no one like Basil in the world, and we all know it so well, that I thought you did also."

"A pretty confession from a wife to her husband, Queen Margaret."

"In what way, Harold?" she answered.

"Did you not say, there was no one in the world like Basil? and am not I, your husband, deemed worthy a comparison?"

"Oh, no! Harold, I compare you with another? you knew that could not be; a wife does not compare her husband around, about, near her; he is her husband, what more? the rest of the world are nothing."

Harold kissed the earnest, beseeching eyes, half pleased with the devoted love she thus betrayed, and half amused at the seriousness

with which she answered his bantering, though none knew better than he did what that answer would be.

"I am so sorry, Harold, my little Lotty will not be at the wedding."

"I am sorry too, for your sake, dear wife; but I care not much for your little friend, she does not seem to affect me, Margaret."

"Oh, yes! Harold, she does; she is the dearest, truest-hearted little thing in the world."

"She may be, for aught I know."

"I want to ask her to come and see me at Court Leigh; may I, Harold?"

"Ask the whole school if you like, my Meg, governess and all."

Margaret laughed in girlish glee at this notion, and then said, "So kind you are, my Harold."

"But do not forget my mother's lecture upon young ladies, with which she favoured us three nights running; if I mistake not, she

passed some rather severe censures on your Lotty, and designated her an unmannerly hoyden, while Miss Clare was her beau ideal of high breeding and gentlewomanliness. That's a long word, but it is my mother's favourite one, and which she uses as a text when she sermonises Pru. and Pro."

"How funny you are to-night, Harold; but though I cannot explain why, everybody at school loved Lotty, and very few cared for Augusta."

"Oh! that is easily accounted for—Augusta is very handsome."

"Dear Harold, how naughty of you, so unlike you, to say such a thing."

"It is rather sharp of me, I own, but I always feel very lively and chatty, when away from Court Leigh; my spirits get the better of my discretion. But ask all your schoolfellows that you wish, sweet wife, for it will enliven that dull, old place, and Pru. and Pro. want a little school-girl nonsense knocked into them."

"I will ask my bridesmaids and Lotty, Harold; thank you much, and you must ask Basil."

"Very well, we will employ our time in getting up a love-match between him and one of the school-girls; I shall like that, it will be something to do."

"I hope Lotty will be his choice," laughed Margaret, entering into her husband's mirth.

"No, no, none of them will have a chance with Augusta; besides, being much the prettiest, she is much the best hand at flirting: your Lotty is a little bear."

"Ah! that is what we called her at school; she is sometimes cross, but so true and warm-hearted, and she might be so conceited and spoilt, for she is idolised among her own people."

"However, I think none of them quite good enough for that glorious fellow Basil, none but you, Margaret: now how came you, Queen Meg, to miss falling in love with him? con-

fess now, and perhaps I will give you absolution, if you tell the whole truth."

"Indeed," said Margaret, laughing and blushing. "I have nothing to confess; Basil and I were just like brother and sister."

"To tell you the truth, my little wife, I think I just secured you in time; when you left school, and had nothing to think about, and were in the habit of seeing that fine fellow constantly, I doubt you would have tumbled 'full fathom five' in love with him.

"No, no," said Margaret; "only you, Harold."

"I promise you, I am pleased to think so, my Queen. I have taken a great fancy to our host; I never saw a more 'proper man:' with his coat thrown back from that broad powerful chest, his black silk handkerchief knotted with such careless grace around his magnificent throat, his hyacinthine locks, bestowing themselves so picturesquely round his head, I was greatly struck with his appearance at

first sight; then, Meg, when he spoke, when his countenance lighted up, and he looked at me, with his wonderful deep blue eyes, and such a smile passed from the eyes down to the mouth, like the sun breaking through a cloud, why then, Margaret, I wondered you never fell in love with him."

"Dear Meg," said Harold, as they left Erlscourt, "I am sorry to leave this place, and though I mean while we are at Montagu House to trouble Basil pretty often with my company, I somehow feel as if we were leaving a good atmosphere, when leaving him."

Margaret had been content to know that everything went well when Basil was at hand, without finding out the cause; so she merely answered,

"I am so glad, Harold, you like him."

"I do more than like him, I respect him. I begin to think I was not rightly brought up; surely if Lord Erlscourt thinks it necessary to look after his own affairs, to be up early and late, not suffer even the meanest of his people to be denied an audience—it would not be unbecoming a baronet to do the same."

"Oh! Harold, but you would not like it, you would be so troubled and teased; Basil has been accustomed to trouble all his life, his father was not good."

"I feel quite certain I should be horridly bored; but I much question if it is not the proper thing for a landed proprietor to do, Queen Meg."

"It may be, Harold; but perhaps your people are different from Basil's, and I should think your mother would certainly know what was best."

(Ah! sweet Margaret, in your jealous love for your husband's honour, are you not pandering to his besetting sin, indolence?)

"Well, I shall think it over while I stop here, and, at all events, I will watch Basil, and see if I can adopt a hint or two. I believe our people are a horrid set; but from all I can hear, none are more lawless than those about here. And yet what order he has them in; young as he is, those wild forest-men respect and love him as if he were their king. He is never idle one moment; that I agree, would be too much for me."

"Oh, yes! dear Harold, you would be away from me so much."

"What! you always want me by your apron-strings, do you, little wife? I think it would be as well to absent myself now and then, just to see how you would welcome me back again."

"No, no, Harold, I could not bear it."

"Well, well, child, do not turn pale; I dare say I shall never be any thing better than idle Harold Leigh all my life, with no other hard work than to wait on your Ladyship's wishes. But, Meg, I cannot be in Lord Erlscourt's company without thinking; I cannot see his energy, activity, and judgment, without asking myself, where are mine? what am I doing? and I, really, I have no answer to give."

"You would not be other than you are, my Harold?" said Margaret, half mournfully.

"Humph! I am not so sure of that, little wife. I think I could not have been formed only to hunt, shoot, fish, and yawn through life."

Basil was studying Harold's character, and while he did full justice to his frank-hearted,

generous disposition, and perceived that the image he had inherited from God was noble and good, he also saw the mischief that had been done to that character by education. His education had been based on a false foundation. His duties had consisted of outward forms and courtesies: these tend to gild a fine character, and are properly the result of Christian principles, the polish of a self-denying, holy life.

Harold had the gilding, but it had been placed on metal unrefined, untried in the fire. Beneath the gloss, who could tell what dwelt?

Basil also saw, that in the warmth and fervour of a love like Margaret's, the sense that would have budded forth with blossom, had nothing eclipsed it, was fast becoming obscured by a feeling that amounted to idolatry.

It became a character like his, to try and make the man who had married the woman he adored, fit to be her husband; while, in his gentle, brotherly way, he endeavoured to open Margaret's eyes to something besides her Harold.

It was all done so unostentatiously, every right and proper duty was placed before Harold in a manner so pleasing and just, that he returned to Court Leigh with the determination to try and be the worthy, active proprietor of a landed estate.

Had Margaret encouraged him, the trial might have succeeded. But who know better than those who have tried, the difficulties that seem to arise, like mountains in a night, when you begin what may be considered an act of duty?

Harold soon got disgusted with meddling, as his mother called it, in his own affairs. His steward gave him no encouragement, of course; rather perplexed than helped him out of his sea of worries. His mother was scandalised at such unheard-of conduct. Margaret was vexed to see him worried and wearied, while Philip Leigh laughed at him.

No wonder then that Harold relapsed into his old habits, and passed his days in listless

idleness, his ideas becoming as torpid as his body. The measure of his disgust at trying to follow Basil's example, was completed by Gerald Herbert.

The active rector of a long-neglected parish, justified by his holy profession to call alike on rich and poor to amend their lives, Gerald Herbert was deterred by no feeling of self-interest in declaring unwelcome truths; still, with all his high-souled zeal, his pure and ardent labours, Gerald lacked the gift of persuasion.

What was your duty, ought to be done; no compromise, no weak excuses, no allowance for extra feebleness of will and purpose. "You ought," and "you ought not," formed the basis of his creed.

Unflinching, just, and exact, he gave no heed to weaknesses he knew not; he made no allowance for failings he could not understand.

"One sin makes you guilty of all," thus he argued; and his parishioners, long neglected,

and only now hearing what was, their duty grew faint-hearted and wavering under the stern and uncompromising line of conduct he imposed.

And none more so than his patron and their landlord.

Harold, whose heart opened, and whose bosom expanded at a line of conduct that charmed his sense, had he not been peremptorily commanded to adopt it, grew stubborn and irritable under his rector's lash. And Margaret and Millicent sadly learnt that unmitigated, happy intercourse was not to be their lot. The two gentlemen only met to quarrel; that is, Gerald never quarrelled, but he so managed to irritate Harold, that he had but to prefer a request to have it refused. Thus the good that Gerald would, and could, have done, was negatived: Harold grew even more irreligious than he had been; he required to be beguiled into such feelings, never having been taught to consider it aught but a duty. And

thus matters went on, each week adding to the ill effects of the last; Philip Leigh seeing it all, and assisting the evil for purposes of his own.

In due course of time, as Margaret predicted, she had a little Harold; also it was the image of its father.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Margaret had recovered, she fulfilled a once-formed intention, and invited her school-mates to pay her a visit. Augusta accepted with much and unfeigned pleasure. "Her heart and mind had been sadly torn, by the necessity she had felt to break through the strongest ties of love, and separate herself from one who possessed her sole affections, but of whose principles and religious character she could not be satisfied. Though life was henceforward but a vale of darkness for her, she deemed it her duty to bear up with fortitude and resignation, and she felt that the

society of her loved Margaret, and daily communion with the dear Saint Millicent, would prove the only balm that could soothe her, &c., &c., &c." Lotty accepted, on condition that her father was included in the invitation, and that a flight of affectionate Beauvillians might now and then be tolerated, in case they felt it impossible to exist without looking after their chief and "the girl." Flory and Carry were abroad, the one on a wedding tour, and the other accompanying her as the happy bridesmaid.

Lady Katherine much approved of a little company at the great house; it was time Margaret should accustom herself to act the great lady; though the sight of her school-fellows would not probably impress Margaret with the necessity of much assumption of matronly dignity.

"I am pleased, my dear," said the old lady, "that Miss Clare is coming; you will do well, Georgina and Charlotte, to take copy by Miss

Clare. Her carriage is beautiful, her courtesy quite perfection, her manners blend the dignified with the graceful. I do not quite admire your other friend, my dear Margaret."

"My little Lotty! she is so good, Lady Katherine."

"So very obliging," chirped Pro.

"So very kind," said Pru.

"Charlotte and Georgina, you are led away by appearances, I, your mother have said it. Surely the honoured Lady-in-waiting of our good Queen must know who is most worthy of your notice."

An idea crossed Margaret's mind that Lady Katherine was the victim to appearances: but she had too great an opinion of her mother-in law to permit such a fancy to remain there. Harold's mother too! To the honour of the much-subdued Pru. and Pro., they could not subscribe in their hearts to their mother's judgment in this instance; this they showed by being silent when Augusta was the subject

of conversation. For during the brief period of their intercourse at Margaret's wedding, Augusta had made no secret of her amusement at their expense, and indulged in various unpalatable remarks about old maids, and other matters equally foolish and absurd; while the little Lotty had proved their friend on all occasions. And a friend in need she was, for their meek, secluded, quiet ways, were ill fitted to cope with rosy, healthy, happy, intelligent school-life.

Besides she was so amusing, and opened to the view of the two quiet women quite a new species of being in the world. Certainly there were few like that same little Lotty. Wild, capricious, wilful, and passionate, who performed each duty as she did? who thought with such judgment? who mastered the most abstruse lessons with ease, who saw what no one else ever thought of, who was here, there, and every where. A midge, a myth, a fairy, yet a Solon, a Norma, a prophetess, wonderful Lotty! Well

might her mother die with the thought in her heart, "What will be my little Lotty's fate?"

Augusta arrived first of the expected guests, and seemed to find immediate consolation for the sorrows of her wounded heart, by discovering so distinguished and desirable a party as Philip Leigh domesticated in the house. She at once took possession of his present unoccupied time, declaring that his soul was kindred with hers.

Philip was not disinclined to the flirtation; for besides thinking Augusta the handsomest woman he had seen for some time, he had a mind to find out if Margaret would feel the loss of those devoted attentions he had become accustomed to pay her. Augusta's beauty was her only merit; his clear head and strong sense saw through her weak and vain character, before the first evening was over. So, though he continued to amuse himself at her expense, it was merely to see the effect of his experiment. This reason for flirting with

Augusta soon vanished, for ere the end of the week, Margaret, to his great disgust, said to him,

"I am so glad to see, Philip, that you like Augusta; it would be very nice if you married her; I should like her to settle near us."

Philip rode off in dudgeon, and shut himself up at home in a sad, sulky humour. Meantime Lotty and her fine old father arrived, attended by a brother, an uncle, and a kinsman. These latter meant to depart immediately, but Harold's hospitality would not permit of that. It was hard to say which felt the most emotion, as Margaret laid her little child in her schoolhusband's arms.

"I know nothing about babies," said Lotty, trying to smother her feelings.

"Is he not like Harold?" whispered Margaret, as she gazed lovingly on her little child.

"I would rather he was like you," was the answer. "However, I suppose I shall not hurt him if I kiss him. There, sir, go away; in a year or two we may be playfellows."

Really Court Leigh was not like the same place with these happy, jovial, good-hearted Beauvillians in it. Lotty's father was an invalid, and generally remained in his own room until the evening. Not that he was ever alone; sometimes the brother, then the son, and anon the kinsman would be flying upstairs, with eager faces and evident delight, to say that the weather was most beautiful, the wind in the right quarter. This would be discussed with great spirit and interest. Then another would appear to say, that at two o'clock Mr. Beauvilliers was to be ready for his drive; charioteer, Lotty. This always caused a long discussion, how well she drove, who taught her, and other little anecdotes truly Beauvillian. Perhaps the news would be, that so many more flowers had blown, that all the ladies were singing, playing, or working; but no matter what the news or how trivial, from the hearty jovial way in which it was told, it became interesting enough to form matter of history.

In default of Philip, who seemed to have deserted her, Augusta took forcible possession of the kinsman Beauvilliers. The son she heard was married, the uncle too old: but this cousin seemed a most suitable stop-gap, Philip being truant; and he in the most innocent manner fell, as Augusta thought, open-hearted into the trap. He was rather more innocent than Augusta calculated on; for she found that unless she entered with warm interest into all that concerned Lotty and her father, his attentions soon flagged. However, as he was a fine, handsome specimen of the Beauvillians, she put up with a great deal of stupidity from him, and contented herself with snubbing Lotty on all private occasions, and hating her cordially in her secret heart. But she was not prepared for the following stroke of ill fortune.

She had beguiled Frank Beauvilliers (such was his name) into a charming stroll under the old oak avenue; then and there she determined to open upon him the full battery of

her charms and amiability. The engaging, pretty way in which she took his arm, the innocent, kind look that she bestowed on him from those beautiful orbs, might well deceive a stronger mind than that belonging to an open-hearted Beauvillian. Accordingly he became more communicative and cordial than was usual even with his race; and said, in answer to a very kind look,

"I am very much obliged to you indeed for bringing me here; I have something on my mind, and you have been so kind and friendly to me, I think I cannot do better than ask your advice."

"I will give the best I can with the greatest pleasure," said Augusta, not without some wonder: for though she thought her present lover an innocent, in the fullest sense of the word, she did not think he was so very young as to be about to propose, after a week's acquaintance.

"What kind people these are here," said

the good Frank, "they are so thoughtful about Mr. Beauvilliers; Lady Leigh treats him like a father, and he is as well taken care of here as at home. And then so fond of Lotty: even the old grand lady seems inclined to be kind to her; and as for the two Miss Leighs, I really think they look upon Lotty as a sister."

"Very true," said Augusta, in a greater state of amazement than ever.

"Do you know, Miss Clare, I think I never met with kinder people."

"They are very kind certainly, Mr. Frank; but what has that to do with what you have to confide to me?"

"Why, Miss Clare, it has a great deal to do with it: I can assure you, yesterday, when Miss Georgina Leigh was talking to me of Lotty, and describing all her goodness, her attentions to her father, her love for her relations, and then her sense, her wit, her cleverness——Really, Miss Clare, our girl is a perfect wonder; where she gets all her qualities from

I cannot think, unless it was from her mother, who was such a woman! my dear Miss Clare."

"But what has all this to do with what you have to say to me, Mr. Frank?" put in Augusta, impatiently.

"Truly I beg your pardon, Miss Clare, I have wandered from the subject certainly; I always do when I talk of Lotty. However, where was I? oh! to be sure, just where Miss Georgina was talking to me. Really when she said this, all in that low, quiet voice of hers, I could have taken her hand and kissed it; I could indeed, Miss Clare!"

"But is that all, Mr. Frank, you had to communicate?"

"No, not quite, Miss Clare. I wished just to ask your advice; as a friend of the family, you will perhaps be able to tell me if they would be affronted, if they would take it amiss, my just telling them my opinion."

"Of whom, and what, sir?" said Augusta, getting heartily sick of her companion.

"Of Miss Georgina, Miss Clare. I should like to propose for her, she is so fond of our Lotty; really I should like to do something to show my sincere gratitude: and if Miss Georgina would but consent to be my wife, I would make her happiness—"

But Augusta had fled, from what cause the innocent Beauvillian could not surmise. Perhaps it was the heat, perhaps a bee had stung her, and she did not like to inform him; perhaps she had seen some one she knew in the distance. At any rate, the worthy Frank only wondered at her flight, so long as he was dubious whom he should select as her successor in his confidence.

At first he thought it should be the next person he met. Then it occurred to him, it would be but right towards his chieftain to consult him; for he felt sure Mr. Beauvilliers would be as anxious as he was himself, that none of them should entertain ideas or wishes that could not instantly be made known to the

family. In fact, as a point of honour, Mr. Frank felt that he must dismiss the amiable Georgina from his thoughts, until he had fully and thoroughly informed her family of his feelings towards her.

Mr. Beauvilliers proved a much more efficient confidant than Augusta. He not only listened all through with great attention, but joined heartily and cordially in all the digressions on the virtues and extraordinary sense of "the girl;" and when the communication was supposed to be fully detailed, he was quite ready to listen to it all over again.

He duly appreciated Mr. Frank's first motive for bestowing his affections on the amiable and Lotty-loving Georgina: and nothing now remained but to call in the other Beauvillians, uncle and son, to participate in the confidence.

They both fully entered into the matter; applauded Mr. Frank, and were quite jovial over the expedition with which he had fallen into love, but suggested no great improve-

ments in the manner of proceeding in this delicate matter.

So Lotty was sent for; and as they all had anticipated, and told each other it would be, she hit upon the right plan in a moment; moreover she was highly pleased, and so praised Mr. Frank for his judgment and discernment, that he quite blushed.

Acting under Lotty's advice, the party proceeded to Lady Katherine's, and having told what appeared to be the united wishes of the party, asked leave for Mr. Frank to endeavour to make himself agreeable to Miss Georgina.

Now many mothers, with two daughters verging on thirty years of age, who had never had an offer in their lives, and only that little episode of the curate, nipped peremptorily in the bud, as the nearest approach to a love affair, would have accepted at once, and in haste, this unexpected, most sudden sort of love-at-first-sight offer.

Not so Lady Katherine; she took it as a

matter of course; she was thirty herself before she thought of such things, and never dreamt that her daughters would be so unmannerly as not to follow her example. But she was very gracious, and treated them to a series of court anecdotes, which might have begun in matrimony, but certainly did not end in it: they seemed also likely, by their length and repetition, to extend the interview to midnight.

Luckily the dressing bell reminded her that other matters might demand their attention besides listening to her. All Mr. Frank's private affairs were laid before her, and as they proved very satisfactory, he had permission given him to try and win Miss Georgina's affection; "But on no account," said Lady Katherine, "be precipitate—the dear young creature must not be prematurely alarmed; he had known her but a week, so she should wish that a more lengthened period might elapse before he made his proposals in due form; etiquette demanded it," &c., &c. Mr.

Frank scrupulously obeyed Lady Katherine's command, and said nothing of love to the amiable Pro.; but his Beauvillian descent made it impossible for him not to betray his wishes to every person in and around the place, save the gentle object of his affections; everybody knew it, everybody was consulted, and everybody helped him in his courtship, until he, in the gratitude of his heart, wished he could have married them all.

Pro. wondered at his attentions, but said nothing, only to the mischievous Lotty she might say; "Your cousin, Mr. Frank, is a most agreeable man, he has very fine eyes, something like yours, dear Lotty."

CHAPTER XIX.

PHILIP LEIGH had now been shut up for about a fortnight, that is, he had shut himself up. The dark spirit was upon him. He was disgusted with himself, and everything around him. He could not understand Lady Leigh's character, it was an enigma to him; he was acting like a person in the dark; he, whose intellect commanded anything, was he to be foiled by such simplicity as hers?

And yet what was the use of his wearing himself to death for nothing? two healthy lives, each likely to be longer than his, stood between him and his long-wished-for title.

Why need he teaze and worry himself about a thing he could not prevent? Why! indeed: but it had grown into a habit; it had become second nature, amounting almost to monomania.

He was growing tired of himself and his thoughts, they were so mean and contemptible; but where was he to go? what was he to do? There was no amusement in flirting with Miss Clare. Like a moth hurrying around a candle, she would only flutter about him to her own detriment; for as to marrying a woman of that stamp, why he would sooner quit the world at once, no matter how. As he meditated in this desultory way, Philip heard shrieks, prolonged and shrill.

A few bounds brought him to his own entrance gate, where was chained a large bloodhound. Supported by a young girl, was the lady of his late thoughts, Miss Clare, and from her ruby lips came the fearful shrieks.

"Miss Clare, my dear Miss Clare! what is the matter?" he cried.

"The dog, oh! that fearful dog!" screamed Augusta.

"Hush!" said her companion, "Do you not see the hound is chained up?"

The speaker was shaded from Philip's sight by a large hat; she was also half smothered by Augusta's larger, fuller figure.

"Come, Miss Clare, be pacified; as your little friend says, the hound is chained up," said Philip.

"Will you protect me?" gasped Augusta.

"Certainly! take my arm."

"But I am so faint and ill."

"Can you walk as far as my house?"

"What! and pass that savage beast? oh! never."

"Come, Augusta, don't be foolish," said her companion, pettishly; "as if a dog like that would harm you."

"I beg your pardon," said Philip, "Miss Clare is so far right, the dog is a very savage one; but he cannot harm her now, being securely chained."

"A hound like that, is only dangerous when chained up," said the straw hat; "if suffered to be at large, he would be more gentle than a lap-dog."

"You are mad! child," said Augusta, "talking in that foolish way; such a beast would tear you limb from limb."

"It is not safe, I believe, to go near him," said Philip.

As he spoke, the little girlish figure walked straight up to the hound, and patting him on the head, stood leaning against him. Then taking off her hat, she put it playfully on the dog's head, while she ran her little white fingers through her dark curls; and as they divided with the touch, Philip saw, for the first time, Charlotte Beauvilliers.

He deemed her some rare, old picture, descended from its frame, walking about the world to show what unstudied beauty was.

Lotty certainly was very *petite;* though the Beauvillians had assured each other she would grow, yet she only did a very little.

But it was such a pretty, little, light, elastic figure, so rounded and well proportioned, so supple and graceful; the little, lovely throat so stately and erect, and shown to such advantage by the small, well-folded down, white collar.

Lotty had the Beauvillian mouth and nose, the latter bending down with a slight approach to a Roman nose, meeting the short upper lip, with a curve to match; both seemed to be in perfect keeping with the full rosy lip below—putting the gazer in mind of the pictures of Sir Joshua Reynolds' children, but without their archness; for while in his pictures the pointed chin seemed but the continuation of the curved mouth and nose, Lotty's was full and round, giving a decision and firmness to her countenance, that the upper part of her face fully bore out.

Clear, brilliant eyes, without a shadow in them, looked full at Philip. No triumph, no exultation in them, merely the calm, searching gaze of an intelligent mind.

He stood transfixed, at a loss what to say; but his whole heart occupied in looking at the picture before him. The beautiful, dark blood-hound, and the white-robed, childish figure, how lovely they looked, thus grouped together.

"Now, Augusta, you can pass; I will keep the dog quiet as you go by," said Lotty at last.

"You will be killed, you foolish child! and you will be rightly served," was Augusta's answer.

Lotty put her hand under the hound's mouth, and lifting it up, looked steadily into the deep-set eyes; then puttting her lips to his shaggy forehead, she laughed and said,

"He is as quiet as an old sheep."

"It is wonderful," said Philip at last, "the power you seem to have over him; he is generally a most savage animal."

"That is because you chain him up; if he was my dog, he should be as free as air, poor fellow!"

"Will you accept him? you will oblige me

much, if you will allow me the pleasure of presenting him to you."

"I should like to have him very much," said Lotty, frankly; "he is the most splendid fellow I ever saw; he seems quite young too, and has not lost his puppy coat."

"I shall be delighted to give so fine an animal to one so worthy to possess him," was the courteous reply.

"Then I may loose him?"

"Oh! don't; don't for mercy's sake!" said Augusta; "I shall die if you do!"

"Pray, Miss Clare, come up to my small abode, and have some restoratives after your long walk and alarm. Then, while you are resting, the hound can be loosed, and get over his first transports before you return."

"But what is his name?" asked the new possessor.

"Bear," said Philip.

"Bear!" repeated Lotty, rather confusedly.

"Ah! what a good name," said Augusta,

"it is her own, Mr. Leigh; great Bear and little Bear."

"I cannot conceive how your young friend can deserve such a name as Bear."

"Oh! but she does, and I will prove it to you as we walk to your house. Come, little Bear."

"No, I thank you, I am not fatigued, and want no refreshment: I shall stay here and make acquaintance with my new friend:" and turning to Philip, "I thank you, sir, very much for such a gift; I shall value it highly, and you may rest assured I will be a kind mistress to him, though at present I must ask you for a small switch, as he might prove too rough in his first use of liberty."

"I do not like to leave you quite alone with him," said Philip. "I will return shortly, when I have placed Miss Clare in the hands of my housekeeper."

When Philip returned, the great Bear was loose, indulging in the wildest gambols, and

the little Bear was standing on a great stone, watching him with delight. Philip stood and looked at her without her being conscious of his return.

"Bear! Bear!" she cried. The hound bounded towards her. "Down, Bear, down! no rudeness, you beautiful fellow! kiss me, Bear; now be good and be off again."

"Bear! Bear!" again she cried. This time he was disobedient, and she stamped her little foot and shook her little switch, calling "Bear," in a peremptory manner, until he came slowly and deprecatingly, his loving eyes glancing furtively at the little switch, the little hand, the little childish figure. "Naughty Bear! disobedient! go, Lotty does not love you."

Philip could have watched her for hours, the quick grace of her movements, the sweet thrilling voice, the beautiful healthful face glowing and happy, and her dress so picturesque and quaint. The large hat with its long drooping white feather, the cool dress with its little

tight-fitting jacket, showing the white plaited chemisette and round collar, the dainty little boots; she was a perfect picture.

"Well, have you made Bear pretty obedient?"

"Yes, I think so. Do you know, I am very much obliged to you, for I have long wanted a dog like this; are you quite certain you can part with him willingly?"

"Quite certain to you; but pray may I ask the name of the fortunate Bear's mistress?"

"You heard Miss Clare call me Bear too."

"But I presume I may not call you Miss Bear?"

"You are welcome to do so if you wish it: but now we must return home, having a long way to walk."

"Miss Clare says she is too much fatigued to walk back, I have therefore offered to drive her to Court Leigh. Will you also favour me with your company, Miss Bear?"

"Ah, I knew very well when she asked me

this morning to take a long walk, she would never be able to accomplish it; however, come she would: I suppose she had a purpose. Perhaps it was to see you, as you seem old friends."

"I do not presume to think so, Miss Bear, I assure you; but will you not return with me to the house?"

"No, I thank you, I walked here, and can walk back. Good morning, and thank you. Come, Bear."

And before Philip could say another word, the great Bear and the little Bear were careering along the meadows: utterly regardless that they were leaving the company of the handsome, witty, talented, courted Philip Leigh: for aught they seemed to care, he might have been ugly, stupid, and a grandfather.

CHAPTER XX.

PHILIP endeavoured to elicit something from Miss Clare, on their drive home, regarding her little companion. "Who is the child that was with you?" said he. He saw into the depths of Augusta's heart as well as though he were there, and knew that he should gain no information if he showed any great interest in the matter.

"Oh! little Bear; she is a sort of schoolfellow of mine."

"And what is her name, and how came such a little uncongenial companion with you, Miss Clare?"

"Yes, is she not a little absurdity? Poor child! I believe she has been badly brought up, or, at all events, has no mother, only tribes of male relations, and they have made a little groom of her."

"I dare say she will be passable-looking when she grows up." Philip privately thought her the prettiest thing he had ever seen.

"I believe she is grown up; at all events, she has left school."

"Where is she abiding now, that you happened to be in her company?"

"Oh, she is a wonderful friend of Margaret's. How it happened I don't know, but they have sworn a never-to-die friendship, and they are as unlike each other as I am perhaps."

Here Augusta looked bewitchingly at Philip, who answered as was expected: "Like you! Miss Clare, pray what possible thing on earth can be likened to you?"

Then followed sundry little interesting passages in the true art of flirting, which can-

not be described, as the initiated know that words are not so expressive as looks on such occasions.

However, Philip having done what he considered his duty, continued,—"What is the name of your little friend?"

"Dear me!" said Augusta, pettishly, "how much you seem interested about that girl: her name is Lotty, and she is staying at Court Leigh with her father, and some rough, uncouth sorts of men relations. If you stay to dinner—and you are sure to be asked—you will learn all about this pet of yours. But I know you won't stay to dinner, just to provoke me. I declare, if I am to be moped to death as I have been for the last fortnight, I shall go home."

"Ah! Miss Clare, pray don't darken our hemisphere by such a thought. Now that we have seen the sun, can we exist should it leave us?"

Philip continued in this strain until the drive came to an end, mentally resolving to

indemnify himself by staying to dinner if he were asked. Though he did not suppose the little school-girl "Bear" would appear in full company, he thought he might chance to get a glimpse of her in the evening.

The quiet coolness with which she had walked up to the hound in spite of his warning, the unsophisticated delight with which she had taken possession of Bear, without fear, without nonsense of any kind, just suited his taste. "I wish the child was a little older," thought he. "There would be some pleasure in bending that little indomitable spirit to one's will; making such a little wilful thing in love with one. Unlike some one who shall be nameless, but who is unfortunately close by at present, unlike the lovely, love-sick Margaret, unlike the gentle, quiet Millicent. The first, did I marry her, I should beat in a week; the second would pall me with sweetness; the third, I should respect and admire; but wicked human nature like mine is not given to love such saint-like goodness."

Philip Leigh was warmly welcomed back again, and would have been forcibly detained to dinner, had he not already consented to remain.

As all were assembled for dinner, Philip stood, his fine figure erect, his handsome face, calm and proud, with the quiet disdain in his dark eyes that was usual there. He had been introduced to three Mr. Beauvilliers, all bearing their honest, kind natures in their countenances and appearance.

He was watching the amiable goodness with which one of them was devoting himself to the amusement of Pro., when the door opened, and unmistakably a fourth Mr. Beauvilliers appeared. The likeness to the others was palpable; though an aged and white-haired man, they seemed but as shadows in his presence; for a more magnificent specimen of a fine old English gentleman, Philip had never seen. And leaning his large, powerful hand on the dimpled shoulder of a little figure

by his side, Philip could scarcely believe, at first, that he saw before him the little Bear, and the occupier of his thoughts.

"Miss Beauvilliers and Mr. Beauvilliers," said Harold, introducing them; "my cousin, Philip Leigh."

It was a habit of the Beauvillians always to shake hands on an introduction, a good hearty shake; and Philip's hand was in that powerful grasp, without his having withdrawn his eyes from the little fairy figure.

"You are the gentleman who has been so kind as to give my Lotty a very valuable present. Thank ye, sir, thank ye; shake hands, Lotty, and let me hear you say thank ye, too," said her father.

Lotty laid her little tiny hand for a moment in Philip's, who could hardly believe he held anything, after her father's gigantic grasp. Then saying, in a soft, but clear voice, "Thank you, Mr. Leigh," she put the great hand on her shoulder again, and guided

her father's feeble feet to a large chair in the window. There was no look of the child about her now.

"Do you know," said Philip, after dinner, when he had contrived to get a seat near her, "I took you for a little girl."

"I suppose no one would consider me a big one," answered Lotty.

"I mean," said Philip, rather put out by her answer, "that I really thought you were a child. If I had known that you were Miss Beauvilliers, I should have treated you with greater respect."

"And ought not children to have polite treatment as well as ladies?"

"I beg your pardon, certainly they ought; but Miss Clare so puzzled me about you, I fear I ran into great mistakes, and must beg you will grant me forgiveness."

"If I find no fault, I do not see why you need be penitent."

"I will forgive myself, then, for having

fallen into such an error. But permit me to ask, did you reach home in safety? did Bear behave as so noble a dog should, transferred to such lovely hands?"

"We arrived in safety, and I make no doubt, Bear will be much happier with me than you, for he will have his liberty."

"You have been here a fortnight, have you not? and I never knew it; what a dolt I have been," said Philip.

"Perhaps so. But I do not know you sufficiently well to assent to your judgment as yet," replied Lotty.

"Surely you can see that I consider myself a dolt, for having deprived myself, for one whole fortnight, of an introduction to you," continued Philip, trying his usual style of conversation with Augusta.

"I think it was unlucky for Bear; but as for you and I, I do not suppose we shall care for each other, at the end of a fortnight, more than we do now."

"Nay, Miss Beauvilliers, you are unkind to me. May I not look forward to being favoured with your esteem, and then, perhaps, regard, if I prove worthy of such friendship?"

Those large, clear, brilliant eyes, looked full into his. The scrutiny seemed satisfactory.

"I am not likely to think with indifference of the person who has given me so great a pleasure as the possession of Bear. But here is my father coming, and Miss Clare has been looking at you for the last hour, wondering how you can prefer such childish company to hers."

She was at the door ere he could stop her. It opened, Mr. Beauvilliers was there, as she said. "Ah, my darling!" the fond father cried, "as usual, always ready. I came so quietly; but no, I cannot move, but my Lotty hears." The massive hand leant on the little, slight girl, and when placed in his chair, with Lotty on the arm of it, Philip saw he could hope for no further word from the little Bear; so

he talked to Augusta, and looked at Lotty, and was not unhappy.

It was a sight to see the father and daughter together. Lotty seemed to feel intuitively when her father wanted his cushions changed, which foot he would like placed on the footstool, what subject he most affected to converse upon; while at no time did the fine, massive, old frame move, but the large hand rested on the slight figure, sometimes on the round, little ivory shoulder, sometimes on the rich waving curls, but at all times it felt its treasure within its grasp.

There sat Lotty like a little queen, her radiant eyes speaking straight into the heart—"I know my duty, and I love it, and fulfil it;" and the loving Beauvillians would sit round, and pay her the homage she deserved.

And they seemed to have brought the blessing of their fine frank natures on the dull old house of Court Leigh. Harold was no longer morose or unhappy, or inclined to quarrel with

Gerald; Margaret was as beaming and smiling as the happiest wife and mother could be. Lady Katherine stepped forth from out of her courtly state manners, in a way quite astonishing to those who knew her. The ice of reserve and etiquette was thawing under the genial glow of the Beauvilliers.

As for Pru. and Pro., for the first time in their lives, they felt young; and when Pru., (having had that little curate experience, several times mentioned before), suggested to Pro., that Mr. Frank really seemed very particular in his attentions; the gentle Pro. blushed, and the blush remained on her somewhat faded cheek, giving her so pretty a bloom, that Mr. Frank grew quite rampant for the days of his probation to be over.

Gerald's uncompromising sternness gave way before the hearty goodwill of the Beauvilliers.

"My dear sir," said the fine old squire, when Gerald, in the flush of his anxious

heart, to do good to all who came in his way, offered to read and talk daily with him—(for the days of this aged pilgrim were numbered, as he himself knew full well)—"My dear sir, God be merciful to me a sinner. At my age, with the seeds of a mortal disease within me, it does not become me to inquire into any new creed, or way of worshipping God. I ask myself, have I done my duty well? and I can only answer, to the best of my ability, I have tried."

"But, my dear sir, you must confess before God, that you are a miserable, blind, poor, lost sinner. Do you feel the need of a Saviour?"

"I do not feel the need. I feel I have Him; God be thanked for the peace and calm of my closing years."

"That, I am afraid, is not sufficient. We must purge out the old man with fasting, prayer, and penitence; we must not leave a single sin unexposed, unconfessed. Ah!

my dear sir, think of the beatitude of such a state of sinless repose."

"Every man, my dear Mr. Herbert, must not expect such a lot, or where would be the need of the Saviour? I am apt to think now, at the end of the days of my pilgrimage, that this our state is not so much to attain perfection, as to work the daily task of human life, by which we may be rewarded with perfection."

"I see what you mean, Mr. Beauvilliers; but such an error is dangerous, most dangerous."

"It will be dangerous for my father to sit here any longer in this draught, Gerald," would Lotty say; "so while I take him into the house, go and preach to Augusta, or some other great sinner."

Then would Gerald look grave, and perhaps rebuke Lotty for being flippant, who would answer gravely back again—

"I am ready to confess, and be sorry."

CHAPTER XXI.

Mr. Frank's days of probation were over, Lady Katherine having graciously condescended to say, that the time deemed fit by propriety, decorum, and courtly example, being fulfilled, he was at liberty to make his proposals to Miss Georgina herself. And in furtherance of such object, she said to the astonished Pro.—

"Get your parasol, and take a turn with Mr. Frank under the walnut trees."

Certainly, this was rather a public place for such a circumstance, inasmuch as the avenue was commanded from every window in her house, as well as those of Court Leigh.

Pro. never dreamt of disobeying, and Mr. Frank, fortified with various powerful shakes of the hand from his kinsmen, and many good wishes for his success, departed with the amiable object of his affections at a decorous distance from his side.

Most men would have been nervous had they supposed themselves to be under the surveillance of many curious eyes (though no words could be heard) in such delicate circumstances: but it was a peculiarity of the Beauvillians that they could do nothing in secret or alone. Therefore Mr. Frank thought with pleasure and satisfaction, of the eager and anxious Beauvillian eyes that would be scanning his every action, as he took this eventful walk.

Lady Katherine also took her station at her window, that she might be able to judge with her own eyes, that the proposal was made and accepted according to the strictest rules of etiquette. Pro. herself was the only un-

conscious person in all these base plots, and went, perhaps a little fluttered, but quite an innocent victim to her destiny.

They walk about a yard apart.

Mr. Frank bows.

"He is beginning," say the eager Beauvillians, from their windows.

"Very respectful," thinks Lady Katherine, from her window.

Pro. starts, and Mr. Frank bows lower.

"He is in full cry," exclaim his sympathetic kinsmen.

"Poor child! how fluttered she will be," murmurs Lady Katherine.

Pro. stops short, then starts again, as if about to run away. Mr. Frank places himself before her, and bows lower than ever.

"He is well on the scent," cry the Beauvillian windows.

"I almost think he is at this moment proposing," says the other window.

Pro. drops her parasol, and attempts to

grasp at it. Mr. Frank takes the extended hand in his.

"Bravo, Frank! that's the way: you have her now!" cry the Beauvillians.

"Oh!" gasps Lady Katherine; she half thought she must shut her eyes, but her anxiety to see that all was conducted with the strictest propriety, made her look more vigilantly than ever.

Pro. puts her handkerchief to her eyes; Mr. Frank bows lower than ever, so low indeed, that surely he is kissing her hands.

"'Tis done! she's won!" shout the Beauvillians.

"Oh! oh! oh dear!" cries Lady Katherine, and vanishes from the window, for fear he should do it again, or something worse.

Mr. Frank was seen to draw the lady's arm within his, in a very tender and gallant manner, then picking up the parasol, he bore off his prize to a more shady and secluded walk. Not, however, without giving his hat a sort of

flourish in the air, which was the sign agreed upon to denote his complete success, ere they disappeared.

Though all the Beauvillians were impatient to the last degree to shake Mr. Frank's hand off in hearty congratulations, and to bestow kinsmanly salutes upon the bride-elect's cheek, it was deemed only right and kind to send Lotty first, for fear she should be overcome; the loving little Lotty, who by winning the gentle Pro.'s heart, had inspired Mr. Frank with such a prodigious idea of her sense and discernment.

Lotty met them after an hour's absence. Mr. Frank was like a sun-flower; so broad and expansive was his triumphant delight. Pro. had shrunk between bashfulness and bewilderment into such a shred, that she was quite hidden behind the glowing Mr. Frank.

"How do you do, dear cousin Georgina?" said Lotty, smiling.

"Oh! dear," cried Pro., getting quite limp

and damp, with a sudden gush of tears; "how very nice! and you, darling Lotty, is it true, that we shall be cousins? Dear! dear! how am I ever to believe this wonderful thing!"

"I knew you would be pleased, dearest Georgina," said the gallant Mr. Frank, "at being Lotty's cousin. I felt more certain that you would accept me on that account than any other."

"Yes, indeed," answered Pro., innocently; "you are very kind to say so, Mr. Frank, that is just it. But, indeed, I ought to say, that you—that is all—in fact, my sister and I think there never was any family like yours, dear Lotty, for goodness and kindness."

"May you ever think so, dear, sweet Georgina," exclaimed Mr. Frank, pressing her hand so tenderly, that Pro. grew quite nervous, and looked helplessly at Lotty to relieve her.

"I thank you also, cousin Georgina," said Lotty, "and I am sure you will find out

shortly, of all the Beauvillians, big and little, there is no one so good as cousin Frank."

"Shall I indeed?" said the innocent Pro.

"Yes, that you will. See how Margaret loves Harold; that's just the way you will love Frank, and be running after him all day, in the same silly manner."

"No affection that my Georgina deigns to bestow on me, dear Lotty, will be thrown away, as you know," replied Mr. Frank.

"Well, that being clearly arranged, I think you two ought to go to Lady Katherine, to get kissed and blessed. After that, you know, cousin Georgina, you must take to loving Frank instead of me, and I shall expect in a few days, to hear you calling out, at the top of your voice, 'My darling Frank.'"

"I shall ever love you, dear Lotty, in my heart of hearts," whispered the half-smiling, half-crying Pro.

The whole of that evening was spent quite as an April day. When the Beauvillians took

the lead, the sun seemed to shine out in the most refulgent manner; when Lady Katherine spoke, little gentle drippings of rain poured down, in the shape of tears, from herself, Pru. and Pro.

On the whole, it was a most exciting evening; but Lotty was not prepared when she went to their room to wish her new cousin good night, to find the two sisters in convulsions of grief.

"Hey-day!" said Lotty, "what is the matter, that you are howling like two naughty children?"

"We have never been separated," sobbed Pru.

"I only wish Charlotte could marry too," sighed Pro.

"I see not the slightest objection to that," said Lotty; "I will send for another of my cousins, or one of my brothers."

"No, no! oh, no, no! that won't do," cried Pru.

"I don't know, Charlotte, but I think it might," said Pro.

"No, no! oh, no, no!" again cried Pru.

With a great deal of trouble and difficulty, Lotty was at last made aware that there was once a curate.

"Well! so there are now," said Lotty, "numbers, if Charlotte wants to marry a clergyman. I don't think any of our people are in that line, Pro."

"But it was not any curate; it was one, one in particular."

And the elderly, but most simple-hearted Pru. poured forth the long-cherished secret of her heart into the unsympathizing bosom of the little girlish mischief, Lotty.

"Well, don't cry so. If he is half worthy of you, he is still unmarried."

"Yes, I know he is," sobbed Pru., "that makes me so—so—so—" the rest of the sentence was lost in a burst of grief.

"Now do cheer up, Pru., and listen to

reason. When Pro. is married and settled, she could have you to visit her; then she could ask the curate, and then you would meet. Now, what could be nicer than that?"

"And I *will* ask him, dear Charlotte; and Mr. Frank, I know will help me, and ask him too, and then, perhaps, as darling Lotty says, it will all turn out so nicely."

But Pru. still wept sorely.

"Now, Pru., you are naughty," said Lotty, with great ferocity, knitting her brows, and looking as bearish as she could. "Here is your sister so happy, going to marry a Beauvilliers, and he my cousin, and you are weeping like Niobe."

"We have never been separated before, dear Lotty," sobbed Pru., jerking out her words between each sob.

"I am sure if the law would allow it, Frank would marry you both, if he could. But as it won't, you must make up your mind to Pro.'s loss."

"I—I—ca'-a'-ant, dea-e-ar Lo-otty!"

"I will not marry, then, dearest Charlotte, said Pro.; "I will never leave you."

"There," said Lotty, indignantly, "there, what a fine specimen of sisterly affection I see before me. Two fond and loving hearts separated, because you are so selfish, Charlotte."

"Oh, oh, oh, do'-o'-o'- nt, dear Lotty!"

"Made miserable for ever, perhaps they will both pine away and die, and then, when Pro. is the bride of death, as novels say, what will you do then, you unkind Charlotte?"

"Oh, oh, I am so sorry, I will say no more; dear Lotty! pray forgive me. Oh! dear, dear Georgina, take my best wishes for your happiness."

"Now, that's a good girl. And when you see Pro. so happy, acting her very self in her new home, and doing the civil and polite to you, when you pay her a visit; think how delighted you will be, and you will say to yourself — 'I consented to the marriage.

Great as was the sacrifice, I helped to make my Pro. thus happy.'"

Warmed by this glowing description, Pru. dried her eyes, and permitted herself to be comforted.

CHAPTER XXII.

PHILIP LEIGH no longer shut himself up. On the contrary, he was never at home. A master-passion had taken possession of his soul, under the influence of which the long-nourished flourishing plant of envy and malice withered and shrank until it appeared to die.

He kept up a semblance of attentions to Augusta. In fact, she demanded them, and was one of those helpless *exigeante* sorts of young ladies who immediately they see any specimen of the male species near them, become in instant want of a thousand little indispensable absurdities.

Philip would watch the woman-child with his quiet, thoughtful eyes, while he administered to Augusta's many little wishes, the non-fulfilment of which seemed to threaten her with immediate destruction.

"Oh, Mr. Leigh! I have been dying for you to arrive, and play billiards with me; and if you don't come immediately, I shall expire with impatience."

"Pray don't, Miss Clare," returned Philip, "as I shall be under the necessity of acting chief mourner."

"And would you not grieve for me?" murmured Augusta, laying a stress on the personal pronoun, nominative case.

"I fear I should be quite insensible to anything, Miss Clare," said Philip, catching Lotty's amused glance at Augusta's delighted assumption of the one meaning, and utter unconsciousness of the other and more palpable one.

"Don't you think so, Miss Beauvilliers?" continued Philip, who never lost an opportunity of provoking Lotty to talk.

"You ought to be," answered Lotty, drily.

"And pray, child, what can you know about such things? You are as bad as Mr. Herbert with your 'oughts,'" said Augusta.

"As 'good' would have been more appropriate, Augusta."

"Oh! we are getting better, are we? We are going to church to early prayers—"

"No, not going," said Lotty.

"I am sure I am devoutly glad to hear it," said Augusta, with as near an approach to a sneer as her pretty face would allow.

"'Tis as well to be devout about some things," said the imperturbable Lotty.

"But you are devoutly thankful for nothing, Miss Clare," said Philip. "Miss Beauvilliers only said she was not *going* to early prayers. Now she may have gone."

"Oh, the little Puseyite! Pray take me away, Mr. Leigh; I shall be contaminated. Little absurd Bear! I shall tell your father, and get you put into the corner." Lotty raised

her eyes and looked at the fond old father. As she caught his glance, a look of such unutterable love and fondness broke over her face, that Philip was quite startled.

In a moment she was on the arm of the old cushioned chair, the large, loving hand was on her dark curls; she looked like a little pearl gleaming in the clasp of a grand, old, hoary Neptune.

What a protean little thing it was—never two minutes the same. Staid, womanly, and thoughtful in all that concerned her father; wild, laughing, and childish with Pru. and Pro.; clever, witty, and sensible with Margaret and Millicent; sharp, irascible, and sarcastic with Augusta and Philip; and in each and everything the most bewitching little fairy that ever crossed mortal eye.

It was a most lovely summer day, so much so, that when Philip appeared for his now daily visit, he found the whole party, including even Mr. Beauvilliers, out under the trees,

all employed in different ways. Augusta called the visitor to her side, saying, "Mr. Leigh, I have kept this place for you."

Philip surveyed them all. Lady Katherine had a tree to herself, knotting away with diligent industry at what was of no use in the world, as she had already by her the life-labours of herself and daughters at this interesting work, almost all in an unappropriated state. Millicent and Margaret had the next tree, Harold half dozing on the grass by Margaret's side, and half interested in a French novel. Little Harold lay sleeping between them. No wonder, therefore, that Margaret's cheek glowed and her soft eyes sparkled—she had all she loved within her touch.

A little out of the line, but in full sight of Lady Katherine, sat Mr. Frank and the gentle Georgina, she pretending to knot, and he pretending to help her. Pro. was fast losing her name. Under the influence of the Beauvillian bonhommie, Mr. Frank had absolutely saluted his bride elect, and that in the presence of

Lotty; but, however, no one told Lady Katherine. Pru., Augusta, and Philip were under another tree; not far from them was Mr. Beauvilliers' chair, on the arm of which was perched the Little Bear—Great Bear serving as a cushion for the old gentleman's feet.

Presently the Little Bear slid down, and pulling the Great Bear by his ears, with many fond and loving epithets, she so arranged him, as to change Mr. Beauvilliers' position.

"Thanks, my darling!—thanks! that has eased me greatly," said the fond father.

"How you do teaze that dog, Lotty!" cried Augusta.

"Do I teaze you, my Bear?" asked the childish Lotty, as she kissed him; and his great red tongue licked her little white hand.

Great Bear looked up a loving, intelligent answer from his deep-set eyes.

"Dear Lotty teaze anything!" cried Pru., quite in a flush. "Oh, no, Augusta!"

"She does! She is the most thoughtless,

heedless child that ever was! You did very wrong, Mr. Leigh, to trust your fine dog to her," continued Augusta.

Mr. Beauvilliers laid his hand on the pretty head. "Yes, yes; she is a naughty, unkind Lotty!" In the innocence of his heart, he thought Augusta was as ironical in her remarks as himself.

"How will you punish me, father?" said Lotty, still in her childish glee.

"I think I wo'nt love you, Lotty," and the little thing was instantly folded in that large embrace.

"Little Lotty," said Millicent, "I hope you did not get wet this morning; the dew was so heavy."

"Ah, me!" exclaimed Augusta, "the little Puseyite has been to church this morning."

"Did you think of your fond old father, my Lotty?" said Mr. Beauvilliers.

"Yes, father; you know I did."

"I know it, my child; but I like to hear you say so."

"Oh, Mr. Beauvilliers! how can you encourage Lotty in such popish things?" asked Augusta.

"I am sorry if they are popish, Miss Clare; but my Lotty comes in to me from her early prayers with the fresh beauty of a young Christian surrounding her."

"And she is one," whispered Pru., as if to herself.

"Now, Lotty," said Augusta, "come here and confess: why do you go so early to church?"

"To say my prayers."

"Pooh, child! I know that; but what other reason can you give?"

"To get wet with the early dew."

"You are more bearish than ever, Lotty; but I see it is useless trying to get a sensible answer from such a baby as you are!"

"Perhaps, I think you would not understand my answer."

"That is so likely, little goose! however, tell it to me; I must know."

"Then," said Lotty, standing erect before them, "I will tell you my reasons. In the first place, when I heard that Gerald was establishing the early service in the small village, and celebrating the saints' days, besides other things, I questioned to myself the propriety of his doing so."

"Dear me! how kind you were, and how wise you have grown."

"Pray hush, Miss Clare," said Philip; "I am very anxious."

"So am I, dying with curiosity."

"And I," said Margaret, "am also curious; I put faith in my little Lotty's reasons."

"But before I could pass judgment," continued Lotty, "I said to myself, that I must make a trial thereof. And I have done so."

"And pray what is the result?" said one and all.

"I think Gerald will not succeed in his wishes. The present generation are not that primitive race of former days, who, having but

little labour on hand, gladly accepted any occupation for the early hours that were then kept. We can no more force upon the people of this age the religious services and duties that occupied their many leisure hours in earlier times, than we can make them use rushes for carpets, and sheepskins for clothing. Healthy, active, honest industry is religion of itself. True, people may say, that such services occupy but half-an-hour in a day, and that it must be sweet to the labouring man to go to his work, straight from his God: but he does not carry all that his heart holds dear with him; wife and children, or some part of his family, are left at home from necessity. Therefore, I think, if Gerald inculcated family prayer at home, he would be doing more good. That is more fitted for the present day."

"Then why do you go, child?" said Augusta.

"Because," said Lotty, her large eyes growing soft and dark, as the shadow of sorrow passed into them, "I have a prayer to make

to God——" she paused, and continued low, "for a life that I love. And besides," she continued louder, "I like to run a race with the sun. I love to see his bright face gilding up the world, the little dew-drops just waiting to welcome him, and then imperceptibly vanishing. I like to feel fresh and free, as the young bright day; and I like to take all my first feelings to God, in His house. And the world is so beautiful in the early morning.—Now, father, here is the round cushion, it is his turn now; and Bear, Bear, you dear old thing! turn yourself round."

"I think, Lotty," said Harold, rousing himself, "you made some sensible remarks just now."

"Oh, she found them in some book," interrupted Augusta.

"Indeed I did," answered Lotty.

"There, I told you so," exclaimed Augusta.

"And what book, little Lotty?" asked Millicent.

"It is before you," said Lotty, spreading out her hands, and looking with glowing eyes on the scene around them.

"I did not think you were so romantic, Lotty," said Harold.

"I was speaking for you, Harold," said Lotty; "just saying what you would say, as master and head of all here. And thus, Harold, you think of the Forest, and all its loveliness. People talk of architecture, and laws of beauty, and lines of grace. Take the arch of an avenue, and see if lordly man can build such symmetry of grace as that. When we were at Montagu House, Basil used to show us all the beauties of the Forest, did he not, Margaret? And so we came to love trees and Basil together, and both most dearly."

"I am glad to hear you say so, little Lotty," said a voice behind the tree; Lotty turned, and with a glad cry, sprang towards the speaker. He placed both hands round her slight waist, and lifting her, as a feather, from the ground, kissed her on both cheeks.

"Oh don't, Basil; remember I have left school," said Lotty.

"Is that any reason why I should love my little Lotty less?" said Basil, smiling.

Millicent was in his arms; Harold sprang up with alacrity; Margaret gave him a sister's welcome; Augusta arranged her curls. Basil was a better *parti* than Philip; Lady Katherine was most gracious and benign; but all this warm, hearty welcome was nothing to Philip in comparison to the first one. A flush of rage, made a strange tumultuous beating of his heart; and when he saw the noble, expressive countenance, the calm, serene eyes, with nothing of the youth about him, but the fair, waving curls, all the manly bearing of fine athletic grace and power, Philip felt the wild demon of jealousy was running through his veins. The blood of the Leighs was hot and tempestuous when roused. He could have shot the noble specimen of a man that stood before him, like a dog.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Ah, Basil, why did you not come before?" cried Millicent.

"Yes," said Harold, "make a clean breast of it, my dear fellow, and confess why you have been so long in fulfilling your promise of visiting us."

"We have been expecting you with so much anxiety," added Margaret.

"I can assure you, Lord Erlscourt," said Lady Katherine, "your reception has been daily thought of, and cared for, though your unexpected arrival has not permitted us to show you this respect."

Basil smiled, and answered, "I had a very poor reception, I can assure you, Lady Katherine; for when I arrived at the Rectory, there was no kind sister to welcome me; no one, but a man, whom I supposed to be my brother, but who was so deeply absorbed in writing his sermon, that all he did was to show me the door, and direct me in the path to Court Leigh."

"But why did you not come before?" said Millicent.

"Do you not know, Milly, dear, that I have affairs to attend to, more than all children? The two boys had set their hearts on spending their holidays in the Forest with me. I can assure you we have had a merry time."

"They must be very different children to what they were, Basil."

"I am glad to say, quite so, Milly. In fact, I am so proud of them, that I half thought of bringing them down to see you."

"Pray, dear Basil, do so, their next holidays."

"But now, Basil," said Margaret, "you must be introduced to three people—Miss Clare, Mr. Leigh, Lord Erlscourt."

As Basil lifted his hat from his head, and displayed his whole face to their view, Philip felt inclined to curse him in his heart, while Augusta mentally exclaimed,

"He is too beautiful for a man!"

The noble brow was shaded by almost feminine curls, so light and silky were they, the dark blue grey eyes beamed with sweetness but energy, while a lingering shadow in them imparted a look of grave dignity to his whole countenance, that befitted an older man. But when he spoke, and this smile gleamed out, the laughing innocence of a fair, bright boy, seemed to take the place of the older man.

"But where is the third?" said Basil.

"Here!" said Margaret, placing her boy in his arms.

Philip noted the instant change of countenance, the sudden shock, that made the

strong frame tremble with its light burthen, but as he looked, it was gone. Whatever Basil felt, it passed away with the kiss he gave Margaret's boy, and his countenance was serene as ever, when he raised it.

"I am no judge of babies, Margaret," said he, "only of rough, hardy school-boys; and I will show my two against the world."

"I am glad you have come now, Basil," said Lotty; "for we are going home in a week."

"I intend, Lotty, to beguile you and your father to my forest home some day," returned Basil.

"Will you go, father?" asked Lotty, eagerly.

"Yes, my best Lotty."

"And see, Basil, what a splendid hound I have."

"Beautiful; upon my word, he is superb! with him, little Lotty, we shall have rare sport."

Philip's heart grew calmer, as he witnessed

the sort of childish behaviour of Lotty to Lord Erlscourt; and when he left with his sister, was quite ready to join with Augusta in her praises.

"So handsome, so *distinguè*, so elegant," she said.

"So good, so noble, so brave," echoed a little mocking voice behind her.

"You little bear!"

"Then forbear, Augusta, applying such epithets to Basil. In looking at him, one does not think so much of his personal appearance as his character."

"Oh! if we are going to have a sermon, I shall retire."

It did not take Basil many days to discover that beneath the polished surface of their life, there was a sure, though slumbering, volcano sleeping, that required but little to boil over; especially as Gerald confided to him, in glowing, lofty language, the supineness, indolence, and indifference of the squire of his parish;

while Harold, in his turn, dilated on the stern exactness, and almost rude interference, with which his rector meddled in his matters. It was no part of Basil's creed to make himself a go-between. He ever deemed it better policy for people situated as his brother and Sir Harold, to leave them to adjust their own differences; for where strong religious principles, conscientious determination of duty, were mingled with singleness of heart, and utter forgetfulness of self, the uprightness of such a character would make its own way, and bear down all opposition. This, Basil knew, was Gerald's character; and while he might lament that, with over-much zeal, he had created in Harold's heart a strong personal dislike, he deemed that heart too generous and frank to resist the good that Gerald wished him.

But Basil was not aware how much the demon of indolence and torpidity had taken possession of Harold. He was more concerned to see, that the gentle playfellow of

his early days passed on her quiet way, content with the present, without fear for the future. In no one way was Margaret improved, but was sinking into a meek, inanane character, with no feeling beyond what concerned her Harold. And he knew her in reality so different. Many episodes in their childish life rose before him, wherein her sense, her judgment and endurance, all marked her as fitted for much more than the indolent life she was now leading.

"Little Lotty, Queen Margaret is leading a sad, useless life here," said Basil, one day to the little Bear, as she was romping with the great Bear.

"She only thinks of two things in the world, Basil; and that is what you and I are not accustomed to."

"No Lotty; it was different when she was a little, wild school-girl like you. Have you not tried to reason with her?"

"No, Basil."

"Why not?"

"Her time has not yet come. I would rather preach to you, my Bear; you would understand me sooner," continued Lotty, to her dog.

Lotty looked up as Basil continued silent. He was in deep, painful thought.

"You must save her, Basil."

"How, Lotty?"

"I don't know; but you must try to awaken her from her dream of security. I thought one night she would perhaps show some emotion. Harold was not quite good—sometimes he is not—that is, you know he stays rather longer in the dining-room than he ought; he always does when Lady Katherine is here. As he lay with sleepy eyes half back in his chair, somebody that shall be nameless entered into conversation with him. I suppose she was more amusing than usual, for there ensued so violent a flirtation, that Lady Katherine swept out of the room like an en-

raged turkey, carrying Pru. and Pro. with her. I looked at Margaret; she did not seem to be taking the least notice. And when that somebody said in a simpering, fawning way, 'I hope, dear, you don't mind my little flirtation with Sir Harold, this evening.' 'Ah, no,' said Queen Margaret, (for which I could have beaten her, Basil), 'it is so kind of you to amuse him.'"

"Did she feel no indignation, Lotty?"

"Well, she might, perhaps; but I'll tell you what she meant, Basil; she would die rather than that any one should think Harold was wrong, or could do wrong!"

"I believe it! I believe it! Yes, I know that must be her thought."

"We are going to drive to-day, Basil; pray come with us. I will be charioteer, and I will take care to drive you to what Gerald would call 'some improving scenes!'"

Having seen both her Harolds so employed until she returned, that they would not miss

her, Margaret went with the delighted Lotty and Basil. Margaret had not enjoyed such a merry drive since she was a school-girl. Basil was most amusing, with all his stories of every-day life, and what he did at home, looking so fresh, handsome, and animated, that, whether she liked it or not, the idea of a dark, silent, heavy companion, who usually sat there, was perpetually rising to her mind in contrast. Then Lotty's quaint little comments upon Basil's stories were so racy, that even he was in fits of laughing. They had no servant with them, and, whether from design or accident, Lotty was perpetually desiring to have something done to the harness. Basil would be out at the ponies' heads on the instant.

"Our servant is active, is he not, Queen Meg?"

"He is indeed, my Lotty; how he springs out! it is quite a pleasure to see him. But I am so afraid that in doing it thus quickly, he may get hurt."

"No fear," said Lotty, "otherwise I would not trouble him. But I have a mind to see how long a man, who calls himself a gentleman, will consider it necessary to obey a woman's will."

"I think you have tried Basil enough, Lotty; this is the sixth time you have made him get out."

"Yes, it is of no use trying this experiment on him, for if I were to ask him six times more, he would be just as ready. I think I will try my plan on one of the lazy Leighs—eh, my Queen?"

"Then you will never get them to obey you," said Margaret, laughing merrily, as if Lotty was in joke. "But go on now, Lotty, for Basil is up again."

They arrived at what appeared to be a ruined farmstead, nevertheless sounds came from within the half-roofed house: a few poor, miserable fowls were scattered about, with some gaunt pigs.

"Desirable place that," said Lotty, laconically; "I was thinking of asking for a glass of water, for Bear and me. Do you think we shall get it here, Basil?"

"I will go and ask, little Lotty."

"No, no, you will knock your brains out against the door. Margaret and I will go, if you will hold the ponies."

"I will accompany you with pleasure," said Margaret, "but I am sure no one can live there."

But it was inhabited. Sickly, miserable-looking children lay about the floor; a hoarse but feeble voice came from a bed, in a corner of the room, as they entered, and a woman, with a face of woe and starvation terrible to see, making Margaret quite shudder, rose before them.

"I came to ask for a glass of water," said Lotty. The woman sent a little child out with a jug.

"You seem ill," said Margaret.

"Yes, my lady, we are spent at last. After struggling all we could, the last misfortune is come on us: my husband is helpless with rheumatic fever."

"But how happens it, that with all this appearance of having been a large dairy farm," said Lotty, "you are in this plight?"

The woman shook her head, and burst into tears. The man called out from his bed, "It was a miserable hour, ma'am, when we came here. I was worth eight hundred pounds ere I took the farm, but see to what I have fallen, through the grasping hand of my landlord and his agent; they extracted the rent, which was high, to the farthing, but they did nothing that they promised. They gave me no help to drain my land, they let my barns fall, without giving me a stick to help them up; and the cow-shed was blown down one night, killing three out of six cows. I struggled as well as I could, but there is a curse on this estate; I am bound down by a lease, or I would have worked on the road to get away."

"Would your landlord do nothing for you?" said Lotty; "have you not told him of your condition?"

"I have told him myself, I have waited on him night and day. My wife went to see the lady, who seemed to be an angel by the goodness and gentleness in her face, but she had a hard heart beneath. She listened with shut ears, she did not seem to understand; she said, 'Sir Harold must not be disturbed, he was reading or sleeping;' and *we* were starving."

Lotty was too generous, and much too fond of her Queen Margaret, to turn and look at her, as the man continued a tale of woe and hardship, that few believed could exist on England's soil, but which may be the case under similar circumstances. Hard bargains of rent, strict exactions in demanding the same, are not so ruinous to a tenant as the want of his landlord's help to keep his home clean and dry, his buildings in repair and neatness, his gates and fences in order and use, his fields

drained and manured. When this is the case, let the tenant begrudge his landlord no rent, but prove the value of his assistance by the punctuality of his payments. This is the true bond of union between landlord and tenant, and causes the noble country of England to abound in estates, where the landlord lives as a king among those around him, while they bring up their sons and daughters to love and honour the bountiful hand that helps them, the willing ear that listens. While the landlord, on his part, views with pride and delight generation after generation growing up upon his estates, farms passing from father to son, the hereditary love with them: each strengthening the other, until they are part and parcel together.

As Margaret lifted the broken pitcher to her lips, the light fell upon her pale, agitated face. Lotty saw enough, while the woman exclaimed, "It is my lady herself, Lady Leigh!" In the confusion that ensued, Lotty escaped; her

warm, loving heart could not bear to see, what she knew must be there, the first awakening of Margaret from her quiet dream of bliss, pictured in the hitherto smiling face.

"Ah! Basil, I fear we have succeeded too well! I would rather,—what would I not rather, than that she should have this bitter lesson? I would rather see you married to Augusta, I think!"

"Come, Lotty, I do not see why I am to be so severely punished for nothing."

"You deserve some fright, Basil, for Augusta told me last night, you had all but proposed to her; and you know you must have given her some encouragement, she could not quite tell such a——thing, you know."

"It is against my principles, Lotty, to find fault with a lady; but in this instance I so utterly deny the imputation, that I really imagined the lady to be engaged to Philip Leigh."

"What do you think of that man, Basil?"

"I like him so well, that I should be sorry to see him married to Augusta. Both he and Harold have every element of good in them, but both seem somehow to have suffered a defect in their education."

"Not so, Basil, they wanted early self-denial. There was no creed in their bringing up, that told them duty should guide their actions, even though no religious principles were given them."

"Is this my little Lotty talking so wisely?" said Basil, turning her face round to him, and looking into her eyes.

"Oh don't! Basil," said Lotty, "I am no school-girl now."

"What wonderful eyes you have, Lotty! they are like a deep well."

"With truth at the bottom, I hope, Basil; but to return to the Leighs. Margaret would have been different in other hands; why did you let her escape you, Basil?"

"Hush! Lotty, hush! you show no wisdom in speaking thus to me, of a married woman."

"Then I will go and talk to Bear," said Lotty, assuming her childish air.

When Margaret appeared again, they neither of them looked at her: Basil helped her in with kind assiduity, Lotty scolded Bear and ponies vehemently, and kept up afterwards a war of words with Basil. Again they came within sight of a ruined farm-house, with all its buildings in a more dilapidated condition than the first.

"Stop," said Margaret, the first word she had spoken; Lotty drew her ponies up on their haunches.

"No one lives there, Margaret," said she; "is it not so, Basil?"

"I will go and see," said he.

"No," said Margaret, "I must go myself."

"Ah, Basil," said Lotty, as she disappeared under the ruined door-way, "how her voice is changed. Have you been too hard upon her?"

"No, Lotty, with a disposition like Marga-

ret's, nothing but the life she has been lately leading will hurt her."

Margaret returned, her face brighter. No one lived there, but the ruin of everything was sad.

In this way they passed many more homesteads, at all of which Margaret, at her own request, got out and visited them, each wretched, miserable, and forlorn.

As they drove home, in a very different mood from that in which they started, nothing was said. Lotty did not even speak to the spirited ponies, or answer the wondering looks of her Bear.

As Basil handed Margaret out of the carriage, she paused for a moment, on the threshold of her house, and looking at them both with the soft, dark eyes, full of expressive meaning and affection, said gently, but clearly, "Thank you both."

"She is saved," said Basil giving Lotty an

irresistible kiss of congratulation, as he lifted her from the carriage.

"Don't, Basil, you always forget I have left school."

Other eyes saw that kiss, two pair, one of which belonged to a heart that whispered to itself, "I hate Lotty, and I will be revenged upon her somehow."

The owner of the other pair said also, to himself, "Ah! my Lord Erlscourt, it is your turn now, but mine shall come."

CHAPTER XXIV.

To all outward appearances, Margaret seemed as serene as usual; but to Lotty, Basil, and Milicent, there was a change.

"Where is Queen Meg?" asked Harold, one morning, with peevish vexation on his face.

"Oh dear me! she has walked off, no one knows where," replied Augusta, "caring for no one."

"Very tiresome," said Harold, angrily; "she knows I wanted some letters written, and half-a-dozen other things."

"Dear me, Sir Harold! how can you expect a woman to be always running after her hus-

band?" cried Augusta; "I knew Margaret's fit would not last long, as soon as she had old friends about her."

Harold's face flushed.

"I should think," said Lotty, looking up quietly from her book, "if you, Augusta, would give Harold the message Margaret left for him, you would spare him the trouble of putting himself into a rage."

"But, Lotty, it is so unlike Margaret to go away without telling me, or asking me," said Harold.

"I presume, from the peculiarly amiable manner in which you always beg not to be teased with foolish questions, that she was obeying you, in this instance."

"I believe I am very cross sometimes; but really the weather is so hot, and the flies so troublesome, no wonder one gets bored. But what is the message?"

"It was given to Augusta."

"How do you know that?" said Augusta, angrily; "you were not in the room."

"I knew it from this: these are Harold's letters, all written, sealed, and ready to go, with their copies beside them; I am sure you were told to inform him thereof, and beg him to see if they were correct. Then by Harold's chair, I see his little table with his book, the two newspapers, his paper cutter, his footstool, (as if you were some gouty old fellow, Harold); and all these show, that though some business might take Margaret away, Harold was not forgotten."

"You are a good little soul, Lotty, I must say, and very sharp too." So Harold seated himself lazily in his chair, continuing, "You can put all the copies into my drawer, Lotty, and ring the bell, to send the letters off."

"Very well," said Lotty; "and if it won't fatigue your highness too much, I will read you the copies, ere I put them away."

"Do, dear child," said he, laughing at her quaint gravity.

The Beauvillian visit was nearly ended.

Philip tried every means in his power to gain an interview with Lotty alone: she was always in the midst of everybody; if her father did not want her, she was by Margaret's side; and when Pru. and Pro. could possibly catch her, they hung by her with a tenacity that made Philip wish them both deposited in that remarkable sea, which, we suppose from its sanguinary colour, always comes uppermost in people's minds, on such occasions.

Mr. Frank had passed from the excited state of courtship, into a raging fever of haste and eagerness to be married; and he was anxious to get home, to make preparations to receive his Georgina.

Lady Katherine would have besought a delay of six months, for propriety's sake; but the Beauvillian ardour and enthusiasm knocked down Lady Katherine's arguments one after another, like so many nine-pins, and threatened to carry the stately old dame herself quite off the balance of her propriety.

"Dear madam, let them marry," said Mr. Beauvilliers; "why keep them waiting just for a little punctilio? you know royal marriages don't take half so long to settle."

This master-stroke of his chieftain, decided Mr. Frank's happiness, and his fever somewhat abated under the influence of preparation: but as for departing without his charge, that was quite impossible. So the day was fixed, much to the sorrow of every one; and only the day before, did chance favour Philip.

He had joined Lotty, Harold, and Basil, in a ride that Harold had been induced to take, to see a wood that required thinning. Harold was already beginning to feel the want of money; and the prospect of having some wood to sell, that would ease his present care, spurred him to exert himself for once.

Exhilirated by the exertion, and the feeling of doing something, Harold agreed to go on a little farther; but Lotty wished to re-

turn to her father's early dinner. Philip offered to escort her home, with a sudden rush to his heart of tumultuous joy, while his outward appearance was calm as usual.

They chatted very happily for some time. Lotty really liked Philip, he was so amusing; and she gave herself up to friendly and familiar conversation with him, as she would do with Basil.

Receiving no answer to one of her sallies, she looked round and saw Philip with a face quite pale, from internal emotion. He was thinking at the moment that his fate depended upon the answer he meant to make her give him, ere the ride was over; and the possibility that she might refuse him, blanched his cheek.

"Anything the matter, Philip?" said she. His christian name passed her lips as much from surprise to see his agitation, as from a sort of habit she had of becoming familiar with everybody she liked.

"Lotty, Lotty, I love you," said Philip, "I love you to madness. Oh! Lotty, will you be mine?"

She reined up her horse full short. The clear, brilliant eyes looked full at him in astonishment, then, as if unable to bear the burning love expressed in his, so unlike their usual expression, she wheeled her horse suddenly round. With a smart touch of her whip he bounded over the fence by the road side, and shaking his head with indignation, he fled in a mad gallop, across a heavy ploughed field. They were over the next hedge, ere Philip gained his senses.

"Wilful, wicked little thing!" he passionately exclaimed, plunging his spurs into his horse's sides, and following her; "I will make her hear me; I will have an answer."

Though Lotty never looked back, she seemed to know she was being pursued; for the next glimpse he had of her, she was bending over, examining the girths of her saddle. He could

see her, gathering up the folds of her habit, and setting her slight figure firmly in her seat; then, with a clear, ringing chirrup to her horse, away they bounded, as if on a race for life and death.

Philip followed, his brows knit, his teeth set determination even in the waves of his hair, while he muttered to himself, "there is the brook, beyond the long meadow; I shall catch her there." As he thinks this, again he hears the clear voice, cheering her horse. They are over the brook, and are breasting the steep bank on the other side. He could almost hear the little hand patting the good steed who bore her so gallantly, and he felt half mad with vexation and admiration, as he watched the little graceful figure, bending so lightly forward to ease her horse up the nearly perpendicular bank. They are gone over the top, and Lotty might almost have heard the wind bringing the words, "Wilful, wicked little thing!"

As Philip reached the head of the bank, he saw the object of his pursuit far away, three fields off. A sudden pang of fear sent every other feeling from his heart.

"The quarry, ah! the quarry, she will not know of it. My voice is useless at this distance; she will think too, that I but mean to frighten her. Ah! that lovely, exquisite wilful being, is she to meet such a horrible fate?"

Philip spurred wildly on, shouting, though he knew it useless. As he looked, he saw the wild gallop restrained, the obedient steed was changing his stride into a quiet canter.

"Ah, she knows it! how could I doubt her sense and judgment? she sees some sign of unknown danger. Now, now then I have her, now will I make her answer me."

He did not see, as she bent low on her saddle, the furtive glances she was casting behind. As he dashed over the last fence with a wild cry of triumph, she stood still, as if waiting for his approach; but as his horse struck into

his full swing gallop, she suddenly wheeled round, and passing within ten yards of him, bounded over the last hedge, which took her into a lane; ere Philip could pull up his half-mad steed, he saw her far away up the winding lane without the possibility of being overtaken, for she was leisurely cantering along, he was almost sure, switching the hedge-rows as she passed, and singing in the low, happy tone she was wont to do, in her childish moods.

The air might have borne on its viewless, but not voiceless, bosom sundry exclamations, the reverse of good or proper, until the heavy brow unknit; a happy thought had occurred.

"I will turn and go in by the lower lodge. If I spare not my horse, I shall be there before her; and as she emerges from the upper lodge, I shall catch her at the angle of the roads. Speak to her I will, and make her answer me, as the heaven is above us."

He was in time, Lotty was cantering quietly up to the junction of the roads. "Now she

is mine." He thought it too soon; as she caught sight of him, she turned her horse's head in the direction of the walnut avenue.

"Where can she be going now? for that only leads to the flower garden with the ha-ha before it, and the rabbit fence." He followed. "Heavens! she is not so mad as to think of jumping the ha-ha. I hear her speaking to her horse; she gathers up her habit, she is shaking the reins. Stay, Lotty, stay, it will be your death!"

A ringing, mocking, last cheer to her horse sounds in his ear, and Lotty is over, plunging about mid the flower-beds. He lashes his steed, determined to follow; but the wise animal swerves aside, and as he turns him around for another trial, he sees the "little, wild, wicked thing" dismounting from her horse; and giving it a parting switch of her whip, as a hint to take himself off as best he may, she disappears through the wide open window.

CHAPTER XXV.

PHILIP was down betimes for dinner, a flush on his usually pale cheeks, a fire in his generally quiet eye. He was determined to see how she would look on their meeting.

Lotty and her father were almost the last to appear; she in her little white silk dress, with the cluster of fresh roses, so like herself, her only ornament. The rich hair was parted in its usual waving lines, the brilliant eyes looked round as clear and happy as ever; the pretty fresh, innocent face, and the large loving hand on that shoulder, which showed a fresh dimple with every movement; no change in

Lotty. But her appearance was greeted by several voices, among which Augusta's was loudest.

"You are more of a bear than ever, you mad child; how could you ruin Margaret's garden in such a thoughtless manner?"

"Nay," said Margaret, "Lotty is privileged, she can do no wrong to Margaret."

"What on earth were you doing, you two? riding a race?" continued Augusta.

"It looked like it, did it not?" returned Lotty, quietly.

"Ah! Mr. Leigh, I am afraid you have been indulging my pet in her favourite amusement, a ride across country; once set her off, nothing stops her," said Mr. Beauvilliers.

"I fully believe you, sir," muttered Philip, looking straight at Lotty.

A furtive smile of mischief played round her mouth, for which he felt inclined to punish her by making her hear his proposals then and there, before all the company.

"Indeed, Mr. Leigh," cried Augusta, "you really should be careful how you follow that wild thing. I saw from my window what a narrow escape you had, and thought I should have died on the spot."

"Very kind of you, indeed, Augusta," said Lotty; "Mr. Leigh seems too grateful to be able to express his feelings."

"But, my Lotty, you seem to me to have been rash," said her father.

"And would you have had me lose the race, father?" pleaded Lotty.

"Then it was a race?" asked Augusta, turning to Philip.

"Miss Beauvilliers said it was a race," replied Philip; "I did not."

"You little fibbing bear, come here, directly, and tell me what made you ride in that mad manner?"

"When you see danger, don't you always run, Augusta?"

"Yes, of course, child; but how could

you be in any danger with Mr. Leigh near you?"

"I was, I assure you; and as dinner is announced, I will give him leave to tell you all about it."

Lotty could hear Augusta from her end of the table endeavouring to extract something out of the now morose Philip, with no success.

Lotty always sat by her father at dinner, as his aged fingers, stiffened with rheumatic gout, were nearly useless. With Queen Margaret on one side, and her father on the other, no wonder Lotty looked happy and bright, and scores of times made Philip wish himself at home, out of reach of seeing or hearing her.

In consequence of this being the last evening, Harold left the dining-room sooner than usual; and knowing that some hearts were sad at to-morrow's parting, he chimed in very agreeably to Basil's proposal for some music and dancing.

"Come now, Queen Meg., give me some of

your sweet songs first," said Harold; "it is ten days or more since you have sung me to sleep with your low, half-melancholy murmurings; and you know how I like them."

"But I do not," said Margaret, in her soft, but clear tones. "People that have everything they want, and have nothing to be melancholy about, should have heart-stirring, lively music, such as this is." And Margaret broke out into that brilliant galope, the "Spirit of the Ball."

Basil threw his arms round Lotty's little waist, and was flying with her on the wings of the wind. Mr. Frank was whirling Pro. along with irresistible Beauvillian force, though she had not an idea of the step. Mr. Walter Beauvilliers offered his arm politely to Pru., who looked helplessly at her mother, who benignly said: "Go, my dear." Lady Katherine was breaking out into quite a jovial old dame, and seemed so inspired, that her head, fan, hands and feet, were all in a quiver of move-

ment, as if trying to be off themselves: in fact, her whole appearance seemed so enthusiastic, that had old Mr. Beauvilliers a leg to stand upon, he felt he must certainly have asked her to get up and dance with him. And I have no doubt the old lady would have danced quite as well as her daughters. Philip, for a moment, stood with a thunder-cloud on his brow; he had seen an unmistakable look of intelligence pass between Basil and Lotty, as Margaret had answered her husband—a look of triumph and heart-felt delight. What could it mean? But Augusta looked appealingly at him; he offered his arm, and with his heart full of secret anger and disgust, he bore along his fragile and rather languid partner.

Harold apologised for not asking Millicent to dance, by saying he was afraid it would over-fatigue her. But Millicent would accept nothing but his arm, and bore him off. And now as they flew round the room, Lotty and Basil exchanged smiling looks with Queen

Meg.; the two Mr. Beauvillians bore their stumbling, blundering, breathless little partners round in a manner only Beauvillians could do, while Margaret followed her husband and Millicent with loving eyes. Then the gallop changed into the swimming, graceful waltz. Even Harold began with alacrity to dance to the Prima Donna.

"Charming to see young people so enjoy themselves, Madam," said Mr. Beauvilliers.

"I see no harm, I must say," said Lady Katherine, "in a little liveliness; we now and then got up a little dance at court, and then we would sit in a row, his gracious Majesty in the middle, with her gracious Majesty beside him, and the young Princesses would perform a minuet—the minuet de la cour, which speaks for itself, Mr. Beauvilliers."

"It does, Madam," said the old gentleman, in his most polite manner. "My dear brother," continued he, to Mr. Robert Beauvilliers, "do you observe her?"

"I do, brother," said Mr. Robert; "she is like a bird, a feather, a flake of snow."

"She has a pretty flush," continued the father.

"Lovely! my dear brother; I was at that moment thinking I had never seen her look so well."

All being now breathless, and done up as it were, the music suddenly stopped. Harold sunk exhausted, but in a fine flow of spirits, into a seat. Lotty had, somehow, sprung from one step in the waltz to her father's chair. The two Miss Leighs were led, staggering and giddy, with their hair in such confusion as no one in the lives of the Miss Leighs had ever seen it before, to their honoured mother, who might have remonstrated, had she known in what possible words to do it. Such a thing as dishevelled hair was not known at court.

Then began Margaret the spirited song of "The Old Hound," which she sang with such gusto, that the chorus was taken up on all

sides; and when the view halloo was to be given, it was done by every man in the room to his heart's content, accompanied with a little shriek of surprise from Lady Katherine. She had never heard such a sound before, and thought the walls were coming down; she grew grave, and observed to Margaret, that it was a pretty air certainly, but surely the words were vulgar—that is, not meant for such society; she had never heard of such a song at court.

Whereupon, smiling, Margaret said she would sing her one more lady-like, and calling on Augusta to join, they sang "The Elfin Call." Then two Mr. Beauvillians sang a duet, a fine jovial song. Then they danced again; and Philip asked Lotty, and hearing that she was engaged to Harold, wished himself hanged, or at the deuce, privately; which it was, matters little, as he evidently did not mean what he thought.

In the midst of all this hilarity, the pom-

pous, grey-headed old butler announced, in his usually grand way, "Lady Katherine's chair; the Miss Leighs' chair."

"What! already?" exclaimed Harold, in amazement.

Lady Katherine adhered to the good old fashion of sedan chairs. But they had their inconveniences; for though she might squeeze one daughter in with her, she could not two; and as, even in her son's house, she could not leave them behind, while the chair took her the hundred yards she had to go, she was under the necessity of having a chair for herself, and one for the Miss Leighs. To be sure, after Mr. Frank's proposal and acceptance, her chair might have traversed the hundred yards a hundred times, before the other chair followed.

There was such wrapping up of Miss Georgina, such a number of adieux, so many last words to be spoken, so many important things to be said, which had been quite forgotten un-

til that minute; so many charges to Miss Leigh to take care of Miss Georgina. All these things took up time, and yet, notwithstanding all this care and all these charges, before Miss Georgina had time to say, "How polite and attentive he is," and Miss Leigh to respond back in equally laudatory terms, as they trotted along, they would have arrived, and lo! there was Mr. Frank at the door, ready to help them out.

And though this little amiable scene took place upon an average five nights out of every seven, still Miss Georgina was always so surprised to see him, and still Mr. Frank would say, "I could not have rested, dearest Georgina, and not known that you were safe under your mother's roof."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Lotty was gone, and Philip was left behind, and nothing came of all that he vowed to himself should come, so Philip shut himself up.

There was copious and abundant weeping on the departure of the Beauvilliers; Georgina, of course, cried enough for ten, though lovingly assured by Mr. Frank, he would barely eat, drink, or sleep until he saw her again. Pru. was too sisterly not to join her; though Lotty might have a tear in her eye when she bade adieu to Queen Margaret, she was very unsympathetic in parting with the

others. Told Pro. not to cry her eyes out ere she saw her again, as it would probably be inconvenient to Mr. Frank to have a blind wife; recommended Pru. to take lessons from Millicent, in the proper duties of a clergyman's wife, which remark threatened to leave a permanent blush on poor Pru.'s nose. She told Millicent, that good people being scarce, she hoped to see her taking more care of herself when they met again; also, hoped gravely, that Gerald would be nearer perfection, to which Gerald as gravely responded in the same wish. And then whispering a parting piece of advice to Augusta, not to outstay her welcome, Lotty took the little small nook that was left for her in the carriage among her father's cushions. One Mr. Beauvilliers inside with them, two Mr. Beauvilliers outside, with the two servants, and Bear the Great.

As long as the carriage was in sight, so were hats flourished and handkerchiefs waved. Then, in a parting burst of grief, Georgina

sunk on the faithful Charlotte's shoulder, and was considerately led to her couch. All of which was deemed by Lady Katherine truly correct and proper, and very courtly.

"Harold, will you ride with me to-day?" said Basil, after they were gone; "my time is so short here now, that while Gerald is occupied in parochial matters, I am fain to palm myself off on you for amusement."

Harold had just lifted up one of his beloved French novels, intending to ensconce himself in his easy chair. His unwonted exertions of the evening before, had really made him rather stiff; but he was much too partial to Lord Erlscourt to refuse. "My dear fellow! with pleasure. I dare say the ride will take off my aches, too; though, unless I had the inducement of your company, I don't think I should stir."

"Ha!" said Harold, as they passed the same farm-house where Lotty had asked for water, "what are they doing here? They seem to

be repairing the place. High time, too, idle, lazy rascals !"

"This is a wonderfully rich country," said Lord Erlscourt.

"I believe it is," returned Harold; "but the worst for tenants, in the world. I cannot get any, and when I have them, they won't pay, or they run away."

"What sort of steward have you?"

"Oh, a rascal, like the rest of them. There really is no honesty about this place, and I am sick of it."

"It is a lovely country," said Basil.

"I allow it is, and I believe I should be fond of it, if I were not so harassed and teased. Lying on the grass among the flowers, looking at the fine old trees, from them to the grey, picturesque old house, with Margaret running about after her boy, I have often thought few could have a home so beautiful."

"I don't quite know," said Basil, smiling, "what harasses you?"

"Why, you know, when I left you, I intended profiting by your example, and looking after my affairs. My dear fellow, whether from design or not, Price, my agent, complicated the simplest matters to such a degree, that I grew quite sick of them. Then the moment it was known that I was investigating matters, such a host of complaining tenants came about me, I was nearly mobbed: I had no peace night or day. Their demands were exorbitant, and their wants so many, that at last I gave up the whole thing in disgust; and as they one and all complained of Price, I thought the best way was to hand them all over to him, and they would be sick of complaining."

"Do you suppose he will act conscientiously by them?" said Basil.

"I neither know nor care; my rent-roll is £7000 a year, and he must find it; and as long as he does, I don't think I need trouble myself."

As he spoke, the tall figure of the rector appeared in sight. He advanced to meet them, glowing with health and apparent satisfaction. "My dear Sir Harold," said he, taking his hand with great eagerness, "allow me to congratulate you. Suffer me to say how delighted I am."

"At what?" said Harold, coldly; for, like all persons whose conscience will make themselves heard some times, he was only the more pertinacious in refusing advice. And like one angry dog meeting another, the meetings of Sir Harold and Gerald Herbert raised within the breast of each an instant spirit of opposition, as the dogs' pugnacious feelings raised their bristles.

"The Wilcoxes, Sir Harold; those poor creatures about whom I have spoken to you so often."

"I know nothing about them," said Harold, the bristles of his mind beginning to rise.

"Why, my dear fellow," said the warm-

hearted, energetic rector, "you are repairing their place, you are roofing their barns, you have lent them money to commence life anew, and I honour you for it. I love you for rousing yourself at last, shaking off the dull, apathetic sloth that enthralled you like a coil of nets."

"I know nothing of what you are speaking about, and I'll thank you not to dictate a line of conduct to me," said Harold, interrupting him, with every bristle in a perpendicular state.

Had Gerald said coldly and deprecatingly, "How foolish you are to repair that old place," Harold was of that disposition, he would have ordered it to be done at any cost.

Now the well-meaning, but injudicious Mr. Herbert, had raised a hornet's nest about him, and without in the least knowing how he could have offended, he yet was obliged to see Sir Harold ride off in a high state of wrath and indignation.

"Your brother-in-law is a fool," said he, at last, to Lord Erlscourt.

"He is injudicious, but no fool," said Basil.

"Did you hear all that rhodomontade about apathy and sloth?"

"He is so active himself, that he does not understand your *dolce far niente* character."

"I wish his activity would not lead him to meddle with me and my affairs; I wonder who has ordered the Wilcoxes' place to be repaired. That was it we passed just now, with the workmen about."

"It seemed to want it," said Basil, carelessly.

"I have no doubt it wanted it, and so does everything under that rascal Price's care; but I won't be dictated to by Herbert. I shall find out who ordered those repairs, and have them stopped."

Basil began talking of his intention to have a yacht in the ensuing summer. "In bringing up boys," said he, "I fancy it a good

thing to let them see a little of everything. My half-brothers are fine fellows, but have a good deal of rather wild blood in them. I mean, therefore, to try the experiment of always keeping their active frames, and still more active minds, in constant exercise."

In this sort of conversation Basil so beguiled the time, that Harold became cool, and talked of having a yacht himself, with evident interest.

On the two ladies, Margaret and Augusta, retiring after dinner, Harold began instantly to exclaim—(Basil had seen that something had occurred to disturb the smooth temper with which they parted before dinner)—"Do you know it is Margaret who ordered those repairs at the Wilcoxes. I have no doubt that fellow, Herbert, set her on."

"I think he would not have greeted you in the manner he did, if he thought it had been Lady Leigh's act."

"True, he did seem surprised, and also

Basil grasped it cordially, continuing: "I knew her nature so well, that once her young heart was given, it was given for ever."

"I believe it," exclaimed Harold, as the image of the fair young bride rose before his view, casting on him that one look of love and gratitude.

"So I gave myself for a task, the purifying my heart of love for her, so that it might be such as it ought, for the wife of another man. And you will not credit my first confidence, if you believe not the second; my love for Margaret is as that of a fond brother."

"I cannot but believe you, Basil, and I thank you for your confidence. I think you have a motive in it—tell it me."

"You think Margaret but a loving, rather simple girl!"

"She is loving, and, as you say, I think her more loving than wise."

"Then you must believe the word of a man,

who so loved her before you ever saw her, that the innermost chamber of his heart seems shut for ever. She is more, much more."

"I shall think with pride, Basil, of the love she gained in so noble a heart, even from a child."

"Then the object of my confidence is gained. Trust her, you will never repent; consult her, you will have the advice of a devoted heart, and clear head. Let her be your help-meet indeed, and not the pretty, pleasant companion of your own hours of pastime. Before you both, are set other tasks to do."

"I understand you. But, Basil, tell me this: is it true, that your heart is closed against all love?"

"No, Harold," said Basil, smiling cheerfully; "against none. In my short life, I have seen enough to know, that protestations do not become weak man. Depend upon it, the more vehement and public his proclamation that his determination is fixed, and his

will, like the ancient laws of Medes and Persians, unalterable, than heaven and earth, man and beast, everything and nothing, seem in a league together to make him eat his words."

"You never said anything more true; I am a living instance of it this day. For now you shall see if your lesson is thrown away, or your confidence misplaced. Queen Margaret," said he, opening the drawing-room door, "tell that rascal, Price, to hurry on with Wilcox's place, and get it finished immediately."

Margaret's eyes looked up, with that one never-forgotten look; but she only said, "Thank you, Harold."

"You are quite right, Basil," whispered he, "she is remarkably sensible; now, if she had gone off into heroics, and teased me with ecstacies, I, perhaps, should have changed my mind again. You saw that look! humph, well! is not that worth something? Ah! my dear Basil, I forgot."

"Pray don't apologise," said Basil, laugh-

ing heartily at Harold's change of countenance from the exulting to the commiserating; "I will go and have a little flirtation with Miss Clare."

Harold was well content, and seated himself near his Margaret, saying quietly, "Pretty, striking-looking girl! but a poor compliment to pay Margaret, if he does choose her after all."

Basil had estimated Harold's character very justly. At present he was only valuing his wife according to the appreciation of others: she was the best, sweetest, dearest wife in the world, but nothing more. Now he looked at her to-night with, as it were, new eyes, penetrating and observant.

Augusta really needed a little consolation. Sorely in her heart dwelt Lotty's last words, inasmuch as she was quite aware that her conduct had been such as to make the hint desirable. That she must flirt, was necessary to her existence—that is, she thought so. But

in one or two instances, she had gone to such great lengths, that, spite of her beauty and elegant carriage, Lady Katherine had much ado to restrain the indignant feelings roused by her quondam favourite. It was not so much with Philip and Lord Erlscourt; but if they were not within reach, she planted herself by the side of the not always conscious Harold, and disported herself at his expense. Once or twice Lotty had made some sarcastic remarks, which only drew from Augusta the words, "Margaret does not care; what business is it of yours?" Augusta had, besides, the uncomfortable feeling of knowing that Lord Erlscourt was quite indifferent to her charms and manners; and she more than half suspected that Philip Leigh had abated of his loyalty. And while she tried to pooh-pooh the idea, that the odious little Bear had lured him from his allegiance, it would force itself into notice, try all she could. "Not out-stay my welcome indeed! I will stay until I have

secured Philip Leigh, if it is only to spite that child, who, I believe, thinks he is in love with her." What means she used, history saith not; but that she met Philip most days, both Margaret and Millicent knew. And they were daily expecting the announcement of an engagement between them, when Margaret was summoned to her father's dying bed.

In haste and sorrow the party at Court Leigh broke up. Millicent and Gerald were left alone; for Lady Katherine had deemed it proper to have Pro.'s marriage celebrated in London. And the time drew near.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Any excitement that Philip had been undergoing through Augusta's instrumentality, was now gone, leaving a dull blank behind. Moody, irritable, and murmuring, the image of the little, wild, wicked thing, for ever haunted him.

"I will go," said he at last, "and demand her hand formally of her father—anything is better than this horrid state of uncertainty. If I am refused—I am refused; but I will be revenged."

Philip went, and was received at Beau-court in a truly hospitable manner. He was a Leigh, cousin to those Leighs who had entertained

their chieftain, their girl, and their kinsmen so hospitably. It behoved the Beauvillians to show theirs in return to so honoured a guest. Philip's better nature expanded under the frank, jovial hands of this hospitable tribe. Not a Beauvillian but asked him to dine, sleep, sup, live with him; and when, after three weeks' sojourn among them, any one had asked their opinion of Philip Leigh, every Beauvillian, from his heart, would have exclaimed: "He is a right good fellow." But a deep silence fell on the whole tribe when Philip publicly and formally demanded the hand of their girl. They were like bees just learning that their queen was gone, and then, like bees, rushed into a frantic commotion. Not even her birth created a greater sensation.

"Our girl is asked in marriage," said one to the other, when they met.

"A right worthy fellow," says the other, back again.

"She is young," says one.

"To be asked in marriage," says the other.

"But she is so sensible," says one.

"Yes, wonderful," says the other.

"Will she have him?" says one.

"She won't leave her father," says the other.

"I knew it," said both.

At Beau-court a full conclave was held; Philip in the midst, opposite Mr. Beauvilliers. "We duly appreciate your offer—we respect you, Mr. Leigh; but my little child, my pretty Lotty—I have not long to live, and I could not live that short time without her." Thus said Mr. Beauvilliers, and all his kinsmen echoed his words—"The child must not be separated from her father."

"Never! oh, never!" said Philip, earnestly; "I will wait, wait months, years. I will leave my home altogether, and live only amongst you, if I may but hope."

"Very handsome proposal—very generous. How he loves her; excellent young man! he deserves her." Thus exclaimed the Beauvillians,

while the aged father clasped Philip's hand, and said, "Sir, that removes my difficulty. I own that I would wish to take to her mother the assurance that her little daughter was happy in the affections of a fond husband, as she herself was. I own that I should like to know my little one's likely lot, ere I leave her. Now it seems to me, sir, that I would rather give her to you than most people that I know; for you bear the name of Leigh, the name she likes so much; you live near the being whom she loves next to her father. If, sir, you can gain her affections, and if you will dwell here, with me, at Beau-court, until I receive my last summons, take her, and with her, my heartfelt, soul-breathed prayers for you both."

Philip kissed the old man's hand with deep emotion, and good and noble thoughts filled his soul, reflecting themselves through his eyes, so as to make the good Beauvillians think, as they gazed upon him, "he is worthy of our girl."

So she was sent for, innocent little victim, to give her answer before the scrutinizing eyes of her loving kinsmen.

She entered the room in her simple white frock, her large hat full of autumn roses, her great Bear by her side. She took her seat in an unconcerned and simple manner, on her usual place, her father's chair.

"My little Lotty, you know that Mr. Philip demands your hand in marriage."

"Yes, father," said Lotty, throwing a rose at the big Bear.

"We consent to the marriage, if you do, dearest one."

"I do not mean to marry," said Lotty.

"I know, my pet, you will not leave me. But Mr. Leigh will quit his own home, and settle among us, while I remain with my Lotty on earth; then I shall know when I am gone, that she is in the care of a kind husband."

"I am too young to marry," again said Lotty.

"Young in years, my darling, yet old in

thought and wisdom. But your fond old father would like to know that you had a home of your own, though I know full well every home amongst us is open to you."

"It is, it is—we should be proud—all we have—nothing should we delight in so much, as to give a home to our girl."

It was some time ere order could be restored; the vehemence with which every Beauvillian spoke from his heart, was very nearly ending in a scene; for Bear began to fancy some one was about to hurt his little mistress.

However, order being restored, again Mr. Beauvilliers spoke: "Mr. Leigh seems in every way worthy of my Lotty, though perhaps we don't think any one can be quite. Then, when time carries you to your new home, you will live near your beloved school-fellow, Lady Leigh."

For the first time, Lotty looked up, as if listening. "Don't you think, father, I am very young to marry?"

"You are, my child, and I should not urge

it, but for the reasons I have mentioned before. I should wish to see you married ere I die."

"Do you wish me to marry Philip Leigh, father?"

"If you can love him, yes, my child."

Lotty lifted up those matchless, radiant eyes, and looked at Philip. He returned her glance, with the feelings so lately mentioned, glowing from his eyes. "I will try, father, if you wish it."

Philip fell on one knee, and kissed the little hand half held out to him. "I desire no more—I will ask no more," he said. "Deeply do I thank you for the permission you have given me."

As the Beauvillians afterwards declared to each other, and retold again to whomsoever they met, "The scene was beautiful; the young man behaved in the most noble, charming manner; and as for their girl——" But such ecstatics can only be tolerated among the Beauvillians themselves.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARGARET arrived in time to see her father alive, receive his blessing, and watch his aged eyes linger proudly on the features of her noble boy. Then with his hand clasped within that of his wife, he said, "I think, Anne, we did well, to let our Margaret marry," and so fell asleep, with the happy smile of content on his lips. A few words, only audible to that fond and faithful ear, "I feel at peace with God and man," were uttered by those feeble lips; and then they spoke no more. From sleep, he passed into his immortal life.

Margaret and her mother mourned together,

and the kind, ever-ready Basil took charge of Harold. It needed little on his part to increase Harold's esteem and affection for him.

At no moment of the day was Lord Erlscourt unemployed; and as he seemed to count upon Harold's help and assistance in all he did, the latter found himself become unaccountably a man of business.

"My dear fellow," would Basil say, "you will help me amazingly if you would continue marking that plantation for me, that we began yesterday. I have to be off twelve miles in a different direction to attend a county court."

So Harold would blaze away at the trees half the day, and get quite excited about the number.

Perhaps Basil would say, "Here is rather a difficult case to settle between the keepers and some wood stealers; will you, Leigh, kindly hear the matter over for me? They generally imagine I am interested."

So Harold would call forth his best judg-

ment, and really look like a pleased school-boy when Basil remarked, "How quick you are, Harold, at judging character."

Sometimes they would visit buildings under repair, so that during the month of Margaret's seclusion, rarely did Harold return to her, after a hard day's work with Basil, but in happier, healthier, more genial glow than when he left. And Margaret blessed Basil in her heart.

One day she said to Harold, "My kind father has left me fifteen thousand pounds; will you, dear Harold, take it, and use it to put our estate in some such order as this is?"

"I don't think we can do it, Queen Meg. The people there are so different from here. They are not grateful."

"They are very grateful, but they have never had cause to show gratitude to us."

"Well, Meg, I will think about it. Somehow, I fancy nothing good at Court Leigh."

"Dear Harold, our home, the birth-place of our boy!"

"All very true; but there must be something obstinate and aggravating in the air."

Margaret laughed, and said, "Oh! if you are joking, I shall say no more; but I will spend my money as I choose."

"Ah! I see you find Hampshire air just as bad for your constitution as I do Cheshire. But listen, wife. I am about to leave you for a few days; Basil is going to Cowes, to see after a yacht he fancies, and if I see one I like, I shall buy it also. You won't fear letting me away from your apron-strings, with such a nurse as Basil to look after your big baby."

"No, no!" agreed Margaret; "but you will write often?"

"Every hour, I suppose," said Harold.

"I should like that; but I will let you off, and ask for a letter only every other day," returned Margaret.

"We are also going to make an excursion to see his boys, as he calls them. If they have been good, they are to go with us to see

the yacht, it being principally for their amusement that he buys one."

"How good Basil is."

"Extraordinary, Queen Meg; and I have generally a horror of such sorts of kine: they seem to be a perpetual species of blister, or reproach. But Basil is so fearless and independent, so daring, if I may use the word. He is first in all the night-watches we have been lately having, and does all those sorts of manly things; yet he is as kind-hearted, tender, and good as a woman—as you, Margaret."

"I hope he is rather more firm in character than I am. But when do you go?"

"To-morrow."

Harold kept his word for a few days, and wrote, as promised, very happy letters.

"I have seen the boys," said one, "those wicked little animals that used to plague Basil's life out at Erlscourt, and you would not know them. They are splendid fellows to

look at, rather of the gipsy or Spanish order; and then their love for Basil is quite wonderful—a word or look from him is enough. He must be an extraordinary character, thus to have tamed down those two cubs. They make such a handsome picture, the fair Saxon Basil and the two Murillo-looking boys hanging about him, all looking one more happy than another.

"I have bought a yacht, and ordered her to be refitted and got ready for a summer cruise; also, I have determined to call her 'The Marguerite,' after some one whom I am not supposed to love much; or, if you prefer the name of 'The Pearl,' write and say so—it expresses your name as well. By the by, I met your friend, Miss Clare, looking wretchedly ill. They say she has been jilted by Philip; but Philip writes and tells me he is engaged to your Lotty. I am afraid Philip has been a sad dog—and really, of the two, Miss Clare is best-looking, your Lotty is such a child. How-

ever, I cheered her up, and invited her to take a cruise with us in the summer. She did not seem to me in a good humour either."

In another letter, he stated, "that Basil had also bought his yacht, and meant to call her 'The Ripple.' That he had attended a very gay wedding, the bride being Margaret's last remaining bridesmaid. I fancy," continued Harold, in the letter, "that is what has been troubling Miss Clare's nerves. Here you are, all married now, excepting herself, and she was decidedly the most striking among you in personal appearance. It required a discerning fellow, like myself, to select the flower from this flock. If you will grant me longer leave of absence, I intend to take a run up to London, to see Pro. married; and I have met a few old friends here also. I leave Basil to go home by himself."

Harold was altogether absent about a month,

and then returned to take Margaret home. His presence was necessary there, too. Matters had come to that pass on the estates of Court Leigh, that Harold's late trial of business, under Basil's tuition, was likely to be called into immediate and sharp requisition.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THOUGH Philip was in the enviable position of Lotty's accepted lover, and ought to have been, and was considered to be, in the seventh heaven, he felt himself, at times, in just the opposite condition. The little, wild, wicked thing was wilder, more wicked than ever to him. Loving, dutiful, and incessant in her attentions to her father, merry, happy, and affectionate to all her relations, doting on the big Bear, to Philip she was a provoking, teazing, everlasting torment. He chafed and fumed himself into a fever, and then shivered and shook himself out of it.

"Lotty," he said, at last, in a sort of fit of desperation, "is this the sort of way in which you mean me to court you for my wife?"

"I never asked you to marry me; indeed I almost broke my neck to avoid paining you by a refusal."

"You did," he said, his eyes flashing, "you did indeed; and I shall never forget your kindness."

"I never imagined, after that hint," said Lotty, quietly, "you would trouble yourself about me again."

"Trouble myself? Ah, Lotty, if you would but hear me, I would tell you that my feelings are—"

"Stay!" said Lotty, "let us be serious. Do you mean really you are in earnest in your desire to make me your wife?"

"Good heavens! what have I done, to make you think otherwise for a moment?" cried Philip.

"I did not imagine that a man of your age

and experience would, in reality, wish to bind himself down for life to one so childish in every way, so deficient in all the requisite qualities of a wife. Nay! hear me out, Mr. Leigh. One also of whom you know so little; who has in no way returned your affection, who does not even wish to make the trial. Come, confess now at once that your fancy is over, and that you and Lotty will ever be friends, but not lovers."

Philip pressed his hand over his heart, which raged with inward passion, as he heard these calm, cool words. His lips grew white, his cheek pale.

"Oh, Philip!" said Lotty, startled, "what is the matter, are you ill?"

"And it is thus," he gasped out at length, "that you consider a passion which is more to me than life."

"Nay, you must excuse me," said Lotty. "Remember, I have seen you with Augusta Clare. But I go to bring you some water."

During her absence, Philip gave voice to his passion, though alone.

"Wild, wilful, wicked little thing, she shall be mine; hers is the spirit I have often longed to curb and break in. I will make her love me; she shall—madly, wildly, devotedly as I love even the shadow of her form, it shall be the business of my life to make her love me as vehemently. Hitherto no love has entered her heart; as yet she is, as she says, a child. No matter; I mean so to act, that with her father's consent, I keep my vantage ground here. But this strange, weary feeling at my heart—what can it mean?"

Lotty left him immediately after bringing the water, and Philip felt that it was as well, for his passion had overcome him. He had now to learn, if he had never known it before, that to nurse and cherish an evil disease in one's heart, must wear out that heart in some way.

CHAPTER XXX.

As has been before intimated, the Beauvilliers were not so wise as they were amiable. Philip laid himself out to please them all, and was as devoted in his attentions to Mr. Beauvilliers as his dearest son.

The old man began to look upon, and treat him as such; and while his mortal disease grew stronger, his mental faculties and discernment seemed to centre themselves more particularly on what was around him, than a more enlarged space. With Philip always at hand to insinuate his hopes and wishes, no wonder the fond old father grew to think that his

Lotty's invariable silence on the subject, and unchanging manner, were assumed. Only for his sake, was she thus driving from her the love of one he deemed so deserving of her.

In the waywardness of disease, he would have taken the matter in his own hands, and settled it at once, but that Philip besought him not to hurry her. He would trust to time, and her own wishes, he said, for which Mr. Beauvilliers loved him the more, without perceiving that Philip knew his best chance was patience. He saw sufficient determination in Lotty's eyes, to make him fear, that even could he gain her father's orders, she yet might disobey him. He determined to sound her.

"Lotty, you give me no chance, you allow me no opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the woman I wish to make my wife."

"I think, Mr. Leigh," said Lotty, carefully intending to avoid irritating him as she had done last time, "that you mistake; we are always together."

"Yes, by your father's chair, or with others in company; but you never permit me to walk out with you in the early morning. Save one touch of your hand night and morning, you allow me not one single privilege that might be bestowed on your lover."

"You are not my lover," returned Lotty; "you cannot be; you and I judge differently of the love that should subsist between husband and wife."

"And what is your idea?" said Philip, eagerly.

"Look around you, and place before your mental vision all the married couples you know. See, if out of all, one half have not undertaken duties they cannot perform, sworn oaths that they all but forswear; let not us do the same. I know I am not fitted to be your wife; I have not that confidence and esteem for your character, I must have, before I can marry you."

"Why not?" said Philip, with a dark frown.

"You have not acted well by Miss Clare.

I know by her letters that you have permitted her to think she has gained your affections.

"On my honour, Lotty, on my sacred oath I have never done so," said Philip, ardently; "and tell me, do you like me so little, do you even wish to punish me as an enemy, that you give me Augusta Clare for a wife?"

"No, no," said Lotty; "but I do not esteem the man who can flirt with another woman for his own amusement. Miss Clare has in reality very strong feelings when roused; and I am certain, that with real love in her heart, you will find her very unlike the person she has hitherto appeared."

"Never, never, Lotty! for heaven's sake, name her not again in comparison to yourself."

"Then, Mr. Leigh, can you not perceive how frightful it must be to enter into so solemn an engagement without the boundless store of love, which needs large portions to be poured out on many emergencies, and yet lose nothing, but rather gain, the more the stream flows?"

"I have enough for us both, Lotty; my love for you is boundless as the sea, inexhaustible as the sand on its shore."

"Nay, Mr. Leigh, your love is lifeless without mine."

"Do you mean to say you cannot love?"

"Yes, but not now. I am too young—I must not be forced. Look at Lady Leigh and Mrs. Herbert, good, amiable, matchless as they are, in their wife's devotion, can you think they are as well mated as their virtues deserve? I would wish ever to look up to and honour my husband."

"Tell me what you would wish him to be, that I may try to learn."

"He must be so noble in heart that he would trust me as himself; he must be full of that confiding love and faith, so as to disdain to think of his wife as having a separate thought or heart from himself. Frankly, kindly, nobly, must he ever judge me, as I would him."

"You are speaking of——" Philip stopped as abruptly as he had commenced, his eyes gleaming.

"I am speaking of no one in particular," said Lotty.

"Well," said Philip, breathing quick, "if nothing that I can say of my love and devotion moves you, think of your father's wishes."

"Something has blinded my father," said Lotty, lowly and sadly.

"But you would obey him?" said Philip, eagerly.

"He has never yet asked me to do what I did not like," said Lotty.

And that was all he obtained in this conversation.

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